

POSTWAR RECONCILIATION: PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS SRI LANKA'S  
TRILINGUAL EDUCATION POLICY

By

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## **Abstract**

After 26 years, the ethnic-based civil war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009. The Trilingual Education Policy seeks to reconcile the estranged Sinhalese and Tamil communities by teaching each community the other's language in this postwar context. Scholars argue that national reconciliation through Trilingual Education is unlikely to succeed because of the continued mistrust and prejudice between the two communities and the demand for English as key to social mobility and economic prosperity. Since these claims are not supported by empirical evidence, this study seeks to find empirical data to support or counter these claims. The study investigates parental attitudes to their second languages, Sinhala, Tamil, and English, the three languages of the Trilingual Education Policy to understand its likely success. Twenty-one parents whose children receive Sinhala, Tamil, and English L2 tuition in Colombo 5 were selected through convenience sampling. The study uses the constructivist grounded theory, mentalist approach to language attitudes, and concepts of capital and linguisticism for data analysis. The study found that Sinhala has capital for the Tamils and is valued and glorified by them, whereas Tamil has no capital for the Sinhalese and is devalued and stigmatized by them. Both groups valorize and glorify English, for it has more capital than Sinhala/Tamil both locally and translocally. Concluding that the Trilingual Education Policy is unlikely to succeed because of linguisticism, the study recommends providing incentives for learning Sinhala and Tamil and advocating dual language education for reconciling the two communities.

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## **Dedication**

To *ammi* and *peetha*

and

to my loving husband, Kavindra

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

From 1983 to 2009, Sri Lanka suffered a 26year long ethnic-based civil war. In postwar Sri Lanka, the Trilingual Education Policy seeks to reconcile the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups by teaching each community the other's language at the school level. In this study, I investigate parents' attitudes to the Trilingual Education Policy in Sri Lanka to understand the likely success of this policy.

I became invested in this topic of research because the ethnic tensions have had an emotional impact on me as an individual coming of age in war-ravaged Sri Lanka. To ensure ethnic peace in my country, I believe that my role as a linguist is to draw attention to the effective implementation of language policy directed towards Sinhalese-Tamil reconciliation.

#### **1.2. Context**

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. The two major ethnic groups of the country are the Sinhalese and the Tamil. The Sinhalese constitute 75% of the Sri Lankan population while the Tamil constitute 11%. The Sri Lankan Moor, commonly known as the Muslim, are the third major ethnic group of the country. The Muslim constitute 9% of the Sri Lankan population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). The Sinhalese community speak

Sinhala as a first language while the Tamil community and the majority of the Muslim community speak Tamil as a first language.

During the British colonial period, English was the official language of Sri Lanka. In post-independent Sri Lanka, the then Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike implemented the 1956 Sinhala-Only Act which made Sinhala the only official language of the country elevating its status over that of Tamil. This was partially a cause for the civil war between the Sinhalese-led Sri Lankan government and the Liberating Tigers of Tamil Eelam also known as the LTTE or Tamil Tigers. The LTTE argued, in part, that by creating a separate nation-state, Tamils could gain recognition for their mother-tongue.

In 1987, the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed between the former Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to find a solution to the civil war in Sri Lanka. As part of this agreement, the Sri Lankan government passed the 13th Amendment to Sri Lanka's Constitution. This amendment made Tamil an official language alongside Sinhala, and English a link language of the country. At present, Chapter IV of the Constitution designates both Sinhala and Tamil as the official and national languages and English as the link language of Sri Lanka (The Parliament Secretariat, 2015).

Further, Chapter IV defines the use of national languages, Sinhala and Tamil in parliament, provincial councils, and local authorities and as a medium of instruction. In short, members of the parliament, provincial councils, and local authorities can perform their duties in either Sinhala or Tamil, and people can be educated in either national language. As per the 16th Amendment to the Constitution in 1988, Chapter IV also states that Sinhala and Tamil are the languages of administration and legislation (The Parliament Secretariat, 2015).

The war ended in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE. In 2010, the Sri Lankan government appointed the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) to investigate the lessons to be learned from the civil war and take action to promote reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. The Ten-Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka 2012-2022 was drafted in 2011 as “the first comprehensive document” from the Head of State on creating a trilingual nation (Fernando, 2011, p. 1). The 2011 Report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and the Ten-Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka recommended the Trilingual Education Policy. I learned from the Media Director of the Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka that there is no formal policy document for the Trilingual Education Policy (H. Dassanayake, Personal Communication, December 20, 2017). However, under the section on promoting trilingual education at school, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education (n.d.) states that the Trilingual Education Policy recommendations have been “already implemented in the school system.”

The Trilingual Education Policy seeks to promote national reconciliation between the estranged Sinhalese and Tamil communities. Accordingly, in addition to learning Sinhala or Tamil as a first language and English as a second language, the Sinhalese are required to learn Tamil, and Tamils are required to learn Sinhala from grades 1 through 9. The students also have a choice of taking the language for the G.C.E Ordinary Level examination<sup>1</sup> in grade 11 (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

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<sup>1</sup> The G.C.E Ordinary Level (G.C.E O/L) is a General Certificate of Education qualification in Sri Lanka. The examination is conducted by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. It is based on the subjects that students take during the final two years of senior secondary school (grades 10 and 11). Grade 11 school candidates and external (non-school) candidates can sit the examination.

### **1.3. Rationale**

Ferguson (1996) states that finding answers to questions on language attitudes is central to determining the effectiveness of language policies in education. Whether people are likely to learn a language depends, at least in part, on their attitudes toward that language. If people do not want to learn a language, if they do not consider it desirable, useful, or important in some way then any language policy concerning the teaching of that language is much less likely to succeed. Because of these reasons, I decided to investigate attitudes to the three languages of the Trilingual Education Policy, Sinhala, Tamil, and English to determine the effectiveness of the policy.

It is imperative to state why I chose to investigate parental attitudes. According to Gardner (1985), parental attitudes towards language learning is an important factor in children's second language development. I focused on parental attitudes because parents' attitudes influence children's attitudes and behavior as they play a decisive role in children's language education. While investigating language attitudes of children alongside that of parents would have given me further insight into the subject, the process of receiving consent to interview children was inconvenient for me as a graduate student working within a limited time frame.

### **1.4. Problem Statement and Objective**

Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath (2015) argue that national reconciliation through Trilingual Education is unlikely to succeed. According to Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014), the policy cannot succeed because the current geopolitical trends require Sri Lankans to

master English for economic prosperity and social mobility. In contrast, Herath (2015) argues that continued prejudice and mistrust between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities makes learning the other community's language unlikely.

As a linguist born and bred in Sri Lanka, I am very much invested in this sociolinguistic situation in my country. Since neither Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) nor Herath (2015) give empirical evidence to support their claims, my objective was to conduct an empirical investigation of language attitudes to support or counter these claims by gaining insight into the likely success of the Trilingual Education Policy.

### **1.5. My Study**

In this study, I investigate the following research questions:

- What are parents' attitudes to the three languages of the Trilingual Education Policy, Sinhala, Tamil, and English?
- What do these attitudes imply about the Trilingual Education Policy serving as a national reconciliation mechanism?

Through the above research questions, I wish to better understand Sri Lankan attitudes towards the country's two "national" and "official" languages, Sinhala and Tamil and "link" language, English. My goal is to understand whether these attitudes indicate if national reconciliation through trilingual education can be successful. Based on the findings, I also aim to provide recommendations to facilitate the policy's goal in promoting national reconciliation through language teaching.

I used convenience sampling to select my target group. I have personal contacts with three tutors who conduct Sinhala, Tamil, and English second language tuition classes in Colombo 5 in Sri Lanka. Through them, I gained access to 10 Sinhalese participants, 10 Tamil participants, and 1 Muslim participant whose children attend these tuition classes. I used a questionnaire to collect participants' demographic information and semi-structured interviews to investigate participant beliefs. To analyze the data, I used Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory coding. To answer my first research question, I employed the mentalist approach to language attitudes. To address my second research question, I drew on two other conceptual frameworks, Bourdieu's (1991) "capital" and Skutnabb-Kangas's (1988, 2016) "linguicism."

My study adds to the body of research on language attitudes, ideologies, and policy in Sri Lanka by addressing questions related to Sri Lanka's trilingual education that have not been addressed in any empirical study previously.

## **1.6. Organization**

The rest of the chapters are organized as follows:

In Chapter 2, Literature Review, I define language attitudes (2.2). Second, I discuss Bourdieu's (1991) capital (2.3) and Skutnabb-Kangas's (1988, 2016) linguicism (2.4). Third, I review previous literature on the constitutional status of Sinhala, Tamil, and English, English as *kaduva*, and language policy in education in Sri Lanka (2.5).



In Chapter 3, Methodology, I introduce the research questions (3.1). Second, I discuss my study design (3.2). Third, I discuss my sampling technique (3.3). Then I present my methods of data collection (3.4) and method of data analysis (3.5).

In Chapter 4, Parental Attitudes, I address my first research question: What are parents' attitudes to the three languages of the trilingual education policy, Sinhala, Tamil, and English? First, I discuss Tamil participants' attitudes to Sinhala (4.2). Second, I discuss Sinhalese participants' attitudes to Tamil (4.3). Third, I discuss Sinhalese and Tamil participants' attitudes to English (4.4). Fourth, I discuss the Muslim participants' attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English (4.5). I end the Chapter by categorizing the attitudes into two themes: usefulness and regard (4.6).

In Chapter 5, Postwar Reconciliation: The Likely Success of the Policy, I address the study's second research question: What do the parental language attitudes imply about the trilingual education policy serving as a national reconciliation mechanism? I discuss the attitudes presented in the previous Chapter in terms of Bourdieu's (1991) concept of capital and Skutnabb-Kangas' (1988, 2016) concept of linguisticism (5.2). At the end of the Chapter, I state the conclusions derived from the findings (5.3).

In Chapter 6, Recommendations and Future Research, I discuss recommendations based on findings (6.1). I end the Chapter providing directions for future research (6.2).



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I investigate participant attitudes to the three languages of the Trilingual Education Policy, Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Richards et al. (1992) note that “the measurement of [language] attitudes is important for language teaching and language planning” (p. 199). Ferguson (1996) states that finding answers to questions on language attitudes is central to determining the effectiveness of language policies in education.

I agree with both Richards et al. (1992) and Ferguson (1996). Whether people are likely to learn a language depends on their language attitudes. For example, if people do not find it useful to speak English, they may not find it important to learn English. In such a case, any language policy concerning the teaching of English is not likely to succeed. Understanding people’s attitudes to languages is, therefore, important for predicting how effectively a language policy in education will function.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Trilingual Education Policy attempts to reconcile the estranged Sinhalese and Tamil communities by teaching Tamil to Sinhalese and Sinhala to Tamils. I believe that by investigating the language attitudes of my participants, I will be able to understand if reconciliation between a given group of majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils can be successful. In other words, through an investigation of participant attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English, I will gain insight into the likely success of the Trilingual Education Policy.

In this chapter, first, I discuss language attitudes. Then I review the concepts of capital and linguisticism. I also discuss previous literature related to my study.

## **2.2. Language Attitudes**

Crystal (1997), Richards et al. (1992), Ferguson (1996) and others consider language attitudes to be people's feelings and/or beliefs about their own languages and/or others' languages. Crystal (1997) states that language attitudes are "the feelings people have" about languages (p. 215). Richards et al. (1992) says that these feelings may be positive or negative. Ferguson (1996) links the discovery of language attitudes, to answering the question, "what do the speakers of a language believe or feel about languages of others?" Unfortunately, these scholars do not define what "feelings" or "beliefs" are. Rather, they leave it to the reader to intuit what they mean.

Beginning with a dictionary definition, the English Oxford Living Dictionaries defines a feeling variously as "an emotional state or reaction"; "emotional responses or tendencies to respond"; as well as "an idea or belief" ("feeling," 2019). This same dictionary defines a belief as "an acceptance that something exists or is true"; "something one accepts as true or real"; as well as "a firmly held opinion" ("belief," 2019). With so many definitions and no explicit guidance from the authors, it is difficult to operationalize these concepts.

For some scholars such as Edwards (1994), Fasold (1987) and Richards et al. (1992), language attitudes are not only people's feelings and/or beliefs about languages or language varieties but also a reflection of people's attitudes to speakers of those languages or language varieties. This is an important point, especially in this study. If the purpose of the Trilingual

Education Policy is to integrate the Sri Lankan people, then the degree to which those attitudes reflect Sinhala and Tamil attitudes toward each other's communities may signal the degree to which that policy may facilitate reconciliation between those two communities.

In an attempt to better operationalize language attitudes, I now turn to discuss two approaches used in studying language attitudes.

### **2.2.1. Approaches to the study of language attitudes.**

Scholars such as Appel and Muysken (1987), Fasold (1987), and McKenzie (2010) claim that language attitudes have been studied in terms of two theoretical approaches: 1) the "behaviorist view" and 2) the "mentalist view."

As Appel and Muysken (1987) note, the behaviorist view identifies language attitudes in people's responses to certain languages in how certain languages are used in an actual interaction between people. According to Fasold (1987) and McKenzie (2010), the behaviorist approach sees attitudes in the responses that people make to social situations. For example, a researcher may conclude that a Sinhalese child dislikes Tamil by observing how he constantly refuses to attend Tamil tuition classes.

Fasold (1987) says it is easy for a researcher to undertake a study on language attitudes based on the behaviorist approach. Similarly, McKenzie (2010) says that research conducted based on the behaviorist approach is straightforward. This is because the behaviorist approach does not require respondents' self-reports, but observations of people's behavior (Fasold, 1987; McKenzie, 2010). In other words, the behaviorist approach does not require respondents to talk about their attitudes.

However, McKenzie (2010) says that the behaviorist approach has been criticized because the sole determinant used to understand a person's attitude is that person's behavior. In other words, the behaviorist approach disregards factors such as gender, age, group membership, etc. that may influence a person's behavior (p. 21). A woman's behavior may be different from that of a man; an older person's behavior may be different from that of a younger person; a Christian's behavior may be different from that of a Buddhist. However, factors like age, gender, group membership and so forth are not always observable. Not taking such factors into consideration in understanding a person's behavior may negatively affect the richness of the data analyzed.

Appel and Muysen (1987), Fasold (1987), and McKenzie (2010) state that the mentalist approach focuses on language attitudes as an internal or mental state. Because of this, you cannot directly observe a person's attitude. You have to infer a person's attitude from the person's introspection. As a result, a researcher has to depend on respondents' self-reports of their attitudes. For example, a researcher may interview a Tamil or a Sinhalese and ask them about their children's language education. Based on how they talk about their children's language education, the researcher may infer the attitudes of the Tamil and the Sinhalese respondents toward the languages in question.

In short, as these scholars claim, the behaviorist view considers attitudes to be reflected in people's behavioral responses to social situations. This means that attitudes are directly observable. In contrast, the mentalist view looks at attitudes as an internal state. In other words, attitudes are not directly observable but could be inferred from how respondents talk about their attitudes. In this respect, while the behaviorist approach does not take respondents' self-reports into consideration, the mentalist approach relies on respondents' self-reports.

Fasold (1987) and McKenzie (2010) further state that in the mentalist approach, attitudes are threefold: There is a 1) cognitive component, 2) an affective component, and 3) a conative component.

The cognitive component of an attitude is an individual's knowledge (Fasold, 1987) or beliefs (McKenzie, 2010) about the world. 'Knowledge' here does not refer to objective truth; knowledge is a construct. This construction of knowledge is informed by a person's experience, education, and so forth. I take a belief, therefore, to be a generalized opinion about the nature of the social world and how it works. For example, an interviewee may claim that "English is a universal language". It is ultimately irrelevant whether this claim is objectively true. What is important here, and what makes it a belief, is that the speaker is making a claim about the nature of the social world and the role English plays in that world as "a universal language." For convenience, I will use the term 'belief' to refer to the cognitive component of an attitude.

The affective component refers to an individual's feeling (Fasold, 1987) or emotional response (McKenzie, 2010) towards the attitudinal object. The simplest example of a feeling might be an interviewee who says, "I love speaking in English." In this example, the speaker does not express a generalized opinion, in other words, a belief, but a personal affinity with the language. For convenience, I will use the term 'feeling' to refer to the affective component of an attitude.

The conative component refers to an individual's action (Fasold, 1987) or potential action (McKenzie, 2010) towards the attitudinal object. Such actions must be inferred on the basis of the interviewee's statements. For example, an interviewee may state that "We can use English anywhere." By itself, this statement is a belief about the nature of the social world and the role English has in that world. However, this belief also implies a potential action, the literal use of

English in that social world. For convenience, I will use the term ‘action’ to refer to the conative component of an attitude.

According to Münstermann and van Hout (1988), attitudes must be studied focusing on the relationship between beliefs, feelings, and actions and not in isolation. It is imperative to understand what this relationship is. As McKenzie (2010) states, beliefs could trigger and could be triggered by feelings (pp. 19-20). Edwards (1994) explains that if a person knows or believes something, and/or has some feeling towards it, you can assume that the person may act on that basis. Together, these explanations show that beliefs, feelings, and actions share a dynamic relationship as they draw on and influence each other in forming an attitude. As mentioned before, in my study, I took the mentalist approach to investigating language attitudes, for I relied on participants’ self-reports in interviews. I inferred participants’ attitudes by understanding how their feelings, beliefs, and actions form a dynamic relationship. In other words, I did not take participants’ self-reports at face value. For example, a statement such as “English is necessary wherever you go” is a belief. This belief implies an action. That is, this participant uses English in many contexts. A statement such as “Tamil sounds strange” is a negative feeling towards Tamil. This feeling implies an action. That is, this participant may not use Tamil. As these examples show, I realized that most often the beliefs and feelings in participant statements are somewhat overt while actions are implied.



### 2.3. Capital

I use Bourdieu's (1991) concept of "capital" as a conceptual framework for my study. Bourdieu (1991) notes that "on a given linguistic market, some products are valued more highly than others" (p. 18). In other words, certain languages, language varieties, or dialects can have more value than others in different contexts or societies. This value attached to a language, language variety, or dialect is called "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu, 1991). For example, Sinhala has more linguistic capital than Hindi in Sri Lanka although Hindi has more linguistic capital than Sinhala in India. Sinhala is an official and national language of the country as per Sri Lanka's constitution. It is also required for employment in Sri Lanka. Hindi does not function as such in Sri Lanka. However, in India, Hindi is an official language and may be required for employment while Sinhala is not.

Writing about different forms of capital, Bourdieu (1991) explains that one type of capital can be transformed into another type of capital. Accordingly, "linguistic capital" can be converted into "cultural," "economic" and "symbolic capitals." Cultural capital includes various "cultural acquisitions" such as education, knowledge, and skills. Economic capital includes different forms of "material wealth" and symbolic capital includes "accumulated prestige or honor" (Bourdieu, 1991. p.14). For instance, a Sinhalese student in Sri Lanka who has knowledge of English has the linguistic capital to apply for a degree program in America. By using her English language skills (linguistic capital), this student receives education (cultural capital) from an American university. Thereby, the student converts her linguistic capital to cultural capital. Then the student uses that education qualification to find a job (economic capital) in America. By doing so, the student converts her cultural capital to economic capital.

By gaining an educational qualification and a considerable income from her job, she gains some social prestige. This exemplifies how the student converts her economic capital to symbolic capital.

Different types of capital are available in different social contexts. Bourdieu (1991) refers to such a context as a “field, game, or market.” Individuals act within these fields and may have different quantities of the specific capital necessary to survive or thrive within a particular field. For instance, you can study at a Sri Lankan University such as the University of Colombo without knowing French, but you cannot study at a French University such as the Université de Montréal without knowing French. The Sri Lankan and French universities are different fields that require different forms of linguistic capital in order to function in those fields.

## **2.4. Linguicism**

I use Skutnabb-Kangas’s (1988, 2016) concept of linguicism as another conceptual framework in my study. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, 2016), language is used in society in order to maintain or reproduce unequal division of power and resources between different language groups. She says that this unequal power relationship may have resulted in the “glorification” of the majority group and its language, and the “stigmatization” and “devaluation” of the minority group and its language. This relationship is then “rationalized economically, politically, psychologically, educationally, sociologically, and linguistically” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2016, p. 584). Skutnabb-Kangas (2016) also draws on the concept of capital in her discussion of linguicism. She states that linguicism is evident when people’s linguistic

capital in indigenous, tribal, minority, or minoritized languages is not valued and seen as not lending itself to other types of capital.

A sub-type of linguicism is English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Philipson (1992) defines English linguistic imperialism as asserting and maintaining the dominance of English through “structural and cultural inequalities” between English and other languages (p. 47). These structural inequalities are those which are established and maintained by “material properties” such as institutions and financial allocation and cultural inequalities are those which are established and maintained by “immaterial or ideological properties” such as attitudes and pedagogic principles (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47).

Philipson (1992) further explains that English was imposed on people in colonized countries forcefully during the colonial era, but in the post-colonial era, the linguistic imperialist ideology has been “so persuasive that English has been equated with progress and prosperity” (p. 8). As Philipson (1992) states, three types of “arguments” are used to promote English: 1) “English-intrinsic arguments (what English is - capacities),” 2) “English-extrinsic arguments (what English has - resources),” and 3) “English-functional arguments (what English does - uses)” (p. 271). Philipson (1992) explains:

English intrinsic arguments describe English as rich, varied, noble, well adapted for change, interesting, etc. English extrinsic arguments refer to textbooks, dictionaries, grammar books, rich literature, trained teachers, experts, etc. English functional arguments credit English with real or potential access to modernization, science, technology, etc., with the capacity to unite people within a country and across nations, or with the furthering of international understanding. (Phillipson, 1992, pp. 271-272)

Philipson (1992) states that these arguments come to be seen as “common-sensical” as the English linguistic imperialist ideology becomes normalized (p. 8). Dominated groups glorify English as they internalize the “capacities,” “resources,” and “uses” of English and contribute to the maintenance of the English linguistic imperialist ideology. This valorization and glorification of English over other languages reflects what Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, 2016) calls linguicism.

## **2.5. Previous Literature**

### **2.5.1. Constitutional status of Sinhala, Tamil and English.**

Changes in the constitutional status of Sinhala, Tamil, and English in Sri Lanka are well documented (Bianco, 2011; Canagarajah, 2005; Coperahewa, 2009; Herath, 2015; Kandiah, 1984; Liyanage & Canagarajah, 2014; Perera & Canagarajah, 2010; Raheem & Ratwatte, 2004). In the British period, English was elevated as the “official language” over Sinhala and Tamil. Following the colonial period, Sinhala was made the “official language” of an independent Sri Lanka through the 1956 Sinhala-only Act. This act resulted in the marginalization of Tamil and Tamil speakers whose language was not given official status in the post-independence era. Finally, both Sinhala and Tamil were made “national” and “official languages” by the Thirteenth Amendment to Sri Lanka’s Constitution in 1987. This same amendment officially recognized English as a “link language” of the nation.

### 2.5.2. English as *kaduva*.

In post-independence Sri Lanka, English came to be referred to as *kaduva* – a Sinhala term meaning sword. The sword symbolizes power and prestige; therefore, English as *kaduva* is a symbol of power and prestige (Bianco, 2011; Kandiah, 1984; Lim, 2013). According to Kandiah (1984), *kaduva* is an ideology that demarcates English speakers from non-English speakers in terms of social class, position, power and control. In other words, English provides a path toward upward social mobility in the stratified Sri Lankan society.

Studies investigating attitudes toward, and ideologies about, English in Sri Lanka support the idea that English continues to provide a path toward upward social mobility. In a study of 90 employers in the public and private sectors, Raheem and Gunasekera (1996) confirmed that English is a working official language in both private sector and government sector employment. Focusing on 122 Sri Lankan speakers of English with an academic background (lecturers, university students, and secondary school teachers), Künstler et al. (2009) concluded that participants view English as a tool for socioeconomic advancement and intranational communication. In a study of 2,019 students at the Open University in Nawala in Sri Lanka, Ratwatte (2011) found that her participants view English as a necessity for education and employment as well as a means of attaining social prestige.

While English may be a symbol of power and prestige for some, this same *kaduva* may also be indicative of “defeat, subjugation, humiliation and oppression” for non-English speaking groups (Kandiah, 1984, p. 139), thereby (re)producing social inequality based on differences in language ability. This double-edged sword is highlighted by Canagarajah (1993). In a study of 22 first year Tamil students taking a mandatory ESOL course in the Faculty of Arts at the

University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, Canagarajah (1993) saw “a complex response to the learning of English” (p. 621). Even though students claimed to prioritize learning English because of its socioeconomic importance and their admiration of the Western culture, their “lived culture” revealed that the discourse of ESOL culturally alienated them. As Canagarajah (1993) states, although in their interviews, the students stated that they work hard for English the most and that they enjoy learning the Western culture, their scribbles on their textbooks implied an oppositional attitude. This exemplifies the need among the underprivileged for learning to use *kaduva* to “live in dignity on terms of equality with other men” (Kandiah, 1984, p.139).

### **2.5.3. Language policy in education.**

Formal discussions of language policy in Education in Sri Lanka are relatively rare. Two articles, Mendis (2002) and Raheem (2006) investigate ideologies and attitudes prior to the implementation of Trilingual Education Policy, and two articles, Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath (2015) discuss the Trilingual Education Policy itself.

In her study of 41 Sinhalese and Tamil teachers from three Sinhala, Tamil, and English medium schools and 63 students at the University of Colombo, Mendis (2002) investigates whether language ideologies in Sri Lanka have changed since the post-independence era. Following independence, there was a dispute over whether the official language of the country should be Sinhala or Tamil or both. Mendis (2002) found that the Sinhalese and Tamil participants express a preference for the learning and teaching of both Sinhala and Tamil in school and a need for trilingual education. At the same time, however, she found that many participants are unfamiliar with Sri Lanka’s language policies in place at the time of the study.

Specifically, the Tamil participants were unaware of the constitutional status of the three languages compared to the Sinhalese participants. Mendis (2002) identifies this ignorance as a “form of discrimination” (p. 183).

In a study of 32 Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim university teachers at the Open University in Nawala (Suburb of Colombo) Raheem (2006) found “encouraging trends in communal harmony and linguistic tolerance” (p. 24). Raheem’s (2006) conclusion derives from her finding that the attitudes of both Sinhalese and Tamil participants show that “the languages used in education seems to be shifting to a more all-inclusive policy of all languages being made available to children” (p. 24).

Together, Mendis (2002) and Raheem’s (2006) studies seem to suggest that teachers and university students would be supportive of the Trilingual Education Policy now in effect in Sri Lanka. However, Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath (2015) argue that the Trilingual Education Policy will not be successful. According to Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014), the Trilingual Education Policy may not be successful because “English...is at the center of what people need to master for economic prosperity and social mobility...because the current geopolitical trends have shifted its focus” (p. 32). In contrast, Herath (2015) argues that it is difficult “to make Sinhala/Tamil bilingualism a reality” due to the continued “mistrust” and “prejudice” between the two communities (p. 259). Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath’s (2015) claims are not based on empirical evidence.

As discussed, none of the previous studies have looked at what language attitudes in post war Sri Lanka imply about the Trilingual Education Policy serving as a national reconciliation mechanism. My study adds to the line of previous research by investigating parental attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English following the Trilingual Education Policy.





## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, my research questions are:

- What are parents' attitudes to the three languages of the Trilingual Education Policy, Tamil, Sinhala, and English?
- What do these attitudes imply about the Trilingual Education Policy serving as a national reconciliation mechanism?

This chapter discusses the methods that I used to collect and analyze data to answer these questions.

#### **3.2. Study Design**

This study is qualitative in design (see Bernard, 2000; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; McCracken, 1988). Qualitative research “stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4). As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that I am part of the social fabric that I investigate; therefore, my positionality as a middle-class Sinhalese researcher, influences the process of data collection and analysis and the conclusions derived.

Footnote and Bartell (2011) states:

The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes (p. 46).

In my understanding, positionality refers to how my position (socioeconomic status, level of education, employment status, ethnicity, linguistic background, life experiences and so forth) frames and influences my process of data collection and analysis.

I am a middle-class Sinhalese woman who speaks Sinhala as a first language and English as a second language. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Postgraduate Diploma in International Relations. I am currently pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Applied Linguistics. I have more than two years of experience in teaching English as a second language (ESL) at the college level in both Sri Lanka and the United States.

I have lived in the Gampaha district in Sri Lanka all my life prior to moving to the United States to pursue my graduate studies. The Gampaha district is a neighboring district of the Colombo district. In both districts, the majority of the population are Sinhalese (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). I attended school in the Colombo district from elementary through university level. I have worked in both districts. I write this thesis as a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in Applied Linguistics in the United States.

I believe that my position had an impact on the data collection and analysis process in the following ways:

1. Language barriers affected the quality of the data.

I conducted the interviews in Sinhala or English based on the participants' preference. Unfortunately, due to my lack of proficiency in Tamil, I was unable to conduct interviews in Tamil. As a result, some Tamil participants' responses expressed in Sinhala were unclear to me. In such situations, I asked the participants to explain further.

During one interview with a Tamil participant, the participant found it difficult to express herself in English or Sinhala, so I asked her to shift to Tamil if preferred. She used both Tamil and English in the interview. Her elder child, who was present during the interview, provided me with simultaneous translations so that the interview could proceed uninterrupted. However, I faced a difficult time following the responses, and I must acknowledge that the meaning of certain responses might have been lost in translation.

Further, I did not transcribe Sinhala or Tamil audio recordings. I translated the Sinhala audio recordings to English and received the help of the Tamil tutor to translate the Tamil audio recording into English because it was convenient and time saving. This might have also led to a loss of meaning in translation.

However, I believe that my Sinhala-English bilingual knowledge and skills and expertise in Linguistics and ESL teaching enabled me to translate the Sinhala recordings to English. Similarly, the Tamil tutor's Sinhala-Tamil-English trilingual knowledge and skills as well as her expertise in teaching Tamil as a second language enabled her to help me in translating the Tamil recordings to English. In short, both our language expertise was a significant advantage in translating the recordings.

2. Some participants may have accorded their responses in line with what they considered socially appropriate and acceptable rather than providing honest responses.

As I will discuss in Chapter 5, some Tamil participants may have exaggerated their fondness of Sinhala by talking about how much they admire and respect it. Similarly, some Sinhalese participants may have veiled their negativity towards Tamil by giving indirect responses such as nothing is wrong in learning Tamil. Both groups' responses may have been, in part, a response to my position as a majority Sinhalese and a language researcher. Such responses might have led to a "mismatch" between what the respondents actually do and what they say they do (Schilling, 2013, pp. 103). However, I analyzed the responses without accepting them at face value. To do so, I read the translated and transcribed responses repeatedly trying to infer a holistic picture of participant attitudes. I also discussed my analysis of the responses repeatedly with my advisor.

3. The analysis is informed by my lived experience.

Charmaz (2009) notes that meaning is constructed through the interpretive understandings of the qualitative researcher. This perspective assumes a relativist and reflexive stance toward the data. Accordingly, the findings and conclusions of this study are framed by my knowledge and personal experiences as a middle-class Sinhalese woman who was born and bred in Sri Lanka and currently studying in the United States. I have first-hand experience as to how Sinhala, Tamil, and English function in my own life and more generally in the Colombo district in Sri Lanka. Therefore, I drew on my own lived experience to analyze my findings and draw my conclusions.

It is likely therefore, that another researcher could arrive at different conclusions looking at the same data. With this in mind, I have tried to provide evidence for my conclusions through my participants' own words.

As Connelly (2016) notes, qualitative researchers must ensure that their research is worthy of reading. This is often accomplished by establishing trustworthiness of a study. Polit and Beck (2014) defines trustworthiness as the level of confidence in data, methods, and analysis that ensures the quality of a study. Trustworthiness of a study can be determined in terms of the study's credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Connelly (2016) notes, these criteria are accepted by many qualitative researchers. As a qualitative researcher, I ensure trustworthiness of my study based on these criteria.

Credibility is about ensuring whether a study is conducted using standard procedures that are typical of those in other qualitative studies. For example, I used standard procedures such as convenience sampling to find my target group, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to collect data, and Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory coding to analyze my data. I presented the codes that I identified as part of the constructivist grounded theory coding process to my graduate advisory committee members. Following their feedback, I recoded the data with my graduate advisory committee chair.

Dependability means how stable the data are over time and over the conditions of the study. To ensure dependability of a study, a researcher can maintain a process log that has notes on all activities and decisions concerning the study (Connelly, 2016). I maintained research notes over

the course of the study. These notes are on various decisions that I made in terms of selecting my target group, creating interview guides and so forth.

Confirmability is about the extent to which the findings of a study are consistent and repeatable. To ensure confirmability, a researcher can maintain detailed notes on research decisions and analysis and discuss these with a respected qualitative researcher (Connelly, 2016). I ensured confirmability of my study by discussing my research decisions and presenting my analysis in writing to my graduate committee chair during our weekly meetings. I also presented part of my analysis at the American Association of Applied Linguistics Conference 2019 and received comments and feedback from fellow researchers. This enabled me to get a fresh insight into my data.

Transferability is about the degree to which research findings are applicable to other people in other contexts. Qualitative researchers ensure transferability by explaining in detail the context and people studied (Connelly, 2016). To ensure transferability of my study I discuss the context of my study in Chapter 1 and participant details in this chapter. I acknowledge that researchers conducting similar studies in other contexts focusing on other groups of people may find my findings similar or different to their research findings.

Authenticity is the degree to which researchers realistically present their participants' lives and show a range of different realities. Researchers can ensure authenticity of a study by selecting appropriate research participants and by explaining to the reader in detail the nature of the target group (Connelly, 2016). In this chapter, I discuss in detail the demographics of my participants. I also acknowledge that my sample is not a representative of the entire Sri Lankan population, for I selected my target group based on convenient sampling. Further, I present participant self-reports in their own words in my discussion of the data in Chapter 4.

### 3.3. Sampling Technique

As mentioned in Chapter 1, parental attitudes play a significant role in the success of the Trilingual Education Policy. I used a non-probability sampling method in this study because that method allowed me to gain access to a sample of parents whose children learn Sinhala, Tamil, and English in school. As Trochim et. al. (2015) define, non-probability sampling is “sampling that does not involve random selection” (p. 86). Accordingly, my selection of the target group was not random.

The type of non-probability sampling that I used is convenience sampling. This sampling technique refers to sampling based on convenience accessibility. In other words, the researcher finds potential research participants if it is convenient for him/her to access them (Buchstaller & Khattab, 2013, p. 76). I used this sampling technique since I could gain access to Sinhalese and Tamil parents through three tutors who conduct Sinhala, Tamil, and English private L2 tuition classes in Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.

These tutors provide tuition classes to students who reside in Colombo 5. Classes may be conducted at the student’s residence or at the tutor’s residence. Through the tutors, I was able to gain access to parents and/or guardians of 6 students receiving English L2 tuition, 8 students receiving Sinhala L2 tuition, and 5 students receiving Tamil L2 tuition. Accordingly, I was able to interview 10 Tamil parents, 10 Sinhalese parents, and 1 Muslim parent. Altogether, the target group of my study consists of 21 parents/guardians.

The demographic details of the parents/guardians and students are in tables that follow. I use pseudonyms for participant names. I formed the pseudonyms based on random numbering of each participant’s child, the first and second languages of each participant, and the participant’s

relationship to the child. For example, in the pseudonym 1-SEM, 1 refers to the participant's child (student 1), S refers to the participant's L1 (Sinhala), E refers to the participant's L2 (English), and M refers to the participant's relationship to the child (mother).

It is important to note that my target group is not a representation of the larger Sri Lankan population, for non-probability sampling does not strive for representativeness of the population (Buchstaller and Khattab, 2013, p. 75).



The table below shows the demographic details of the participants whose children receive English, Sinhala, Tamil L2 tuition:

Table 3.1

*Demographics of Parents and Guardians*

Tuition	Participant	Ethnicity	L1	L2	Age	Child	Relationship	Education	Occupation
English	1-SEM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	48	Student 1	Mother	G.C.E A/L	Housewife
	2-SEF	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	47	Student 2	Father	G.C.E. A/L	Administrative Assistant Manager
	2-SM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	-	41	Student 2	Mother	G.C.E. A/L	Housewife
	3-TESM	Tamil	Tamil	English Sinhala	35	Student 3	Mother	G.C.E. A/L	Housewife
	4-SEF	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	41	Student 4	Father	G.C.E. A/L	Senior Merchandiser
	4-SEM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	36	Student 4	Mother	G.C.E. A/L	Coordination Officer
	5-SETM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English Tamil	45	Student 5	Mother	G.C.E. A/L	Housewife
	6-SEM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	-	Student 6	Mother	G.C.E. O/L	Housewife
Sinhala	7-TSM	Tamil	Tamil	Sinhala	39	Student 7	Mother	Up to grade 9	Cleaner
	8-TES	Tamil	Tamil	English Sinhala	39	Student 8	Mother	Master's degree	Teacher
	9-TES	Tamil	Tamil	English Sinhala	39	Student 9	Mother	G.C.E A/L	Housewife

Table 3.1 (Continued)

*Demographics of Parents and Guardians*

32		10-TS	Tamil	Tamil	Sinhala	45	Student 10	Mother	G.C.E O/L	Housewife
		11-TS	Tamil	Tamil	Sinhala	35	Student 11	Father	G.C.E O/L	Salesperson
		12-TS	Tamil	Tamil	Sinhala	38	Student 12	Father	G.C.E O/L	Municipal Council Worker
		13-TES	Tamil	Tamil	English Sinhala	38	Student 13	Mother	Bachelor's degree	Housewife
		14-TES	Tamil	Tamil	English Sinhala	45	Student 14	Mother	G.C.E A/L	Housewife
	Tamil	15-SEM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	42	Student 15	Mother	Higher diploma/diploma	Nurse
		16-SEM	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	-	Student 16	Mother	Higher diploma/diploma	Housewife
		17-SEG	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	45	Student 17	Guardian (Maternal Aunt)	G.C.E A/L	Bank Assistant Manager
		18-ESTM	Muslim	English	Sinhala Tamil	39	Student 18	Mother	Higher diploma/diploma	Interior Designer
		19-TSG	Tamil	Tamil	Sinhala	54	Student 19	Guardian (Paternal Grandmother)	Has not completed school education	Laundry Owner

As Table 3.1 shows, the participants' ethnicity closely tracks with their first language. In other words, Sinhalese participants speak Sinhala, and Tamil participants speak Tamil as their L1. There is one exception. As a Muslim, 18-ESTM would typically be expected to speak Tamil as her L1, but she reports English as her L1.

While two participants (6-SEM, 16-SEM) chose not to disclose their age, I estimate all participants are between the ages 30-55. Among the participants, there are 15 mothers, 4 fathers, and 2 legal guardians. One legal guardian is a paternal grandmother and the other legal guardian is a maternal aunt.

Among the participants, 15 participants have earned a G.C.E A/L<sup>2</sup> or above, and 4 participants have completed their education up to G.C.E O/L while 2 participants have not earned such educational qualification. Among the two participants, 7-TSM reported that she had studied up to the 9th grade and 19-TSG reported that she had not completed school education.

As the participants reported, 9 are housewives while the other 12 are employed as an administrative assistant manager, a senior merchandiser, a coordination officer, a cleaner, a teacher, a salesperson, a municipal council worker, a nurse, a bank assistant manager, an interior designer, and a laundry owner.

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<sup>2</sup> The G.C.E A/L is a General Certificate of Education qualification exam in Sri Lanka conducted annually by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education. It is taken by students during final two years of their schooling (grades 12 and 13 or external candidates) once they have successfully completed the G.C.E. Ordinary Level exams in grade 11.

The table below shows the demographic details of these participants' children who receive English, Sinhala, and Tamil L2 tuition:

Table 3.2

*Demographics of the Students Receiving Private English L2 Tuition in Colombo 5*

Tuition	Student	Ethnicity	L1	Type and district of school	Grade	Other tuition classes
English	1	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 8	Tamil L2, Sinhala L1
	2	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 8	Tamil L2 (past), Sinhala L1, English Elocution
	3	Tamil	Tamil	Semi-Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 8	-
	4	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	Tamil L2, Sinhala L1, English Elocution
	5	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	-
	6	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Semi-Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 8	Tamil L2
Sinhala	7	Tamil	Tamil	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English L2 (past)
	8	Tamil	Tamil	School in the Colombo district	Grade 8	English Elocution, Tamil L1
	9	Tamil	Tamil	Private school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English Elocution
	10	Tamil	Tamil	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 7	English L2, Tamil L1
	11	Tamil	Tamil	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English L2
	12	Tamil	Tamil	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English L2
	13	Tamil	Tamil	School in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English Elocution, English L2
	14	Tamil	Tamil	Semi-Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 8	English L2, Tamil L1

Table 3.2 (Continued)

*Demographics of the Students Receiving Private English L2 Tuition in Colombo 5*

Tamil	15	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English L2
	16	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Semi-Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 7	English Elocution
	17	Sinhalese	Sinhala	Private school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English Elocution, Sinhala L1
	18	Muslim	English	Private school in the Colombo district	Grade 8	English Elocution
	19	Tamil	Sinhala	Government school in the Colombo district	Grade 6	English L2, Sinhala L1, English Elocution (past)

As Table 3.2 shows, the children's ethnicity closely tracks with their first language. In other words, Sinhalese children speak Sinhala and Tamil children speak Tamil as their L1. There are two exceptions. As a Muslim, student 18 would typically be expected to speak Tamil as her L1, but her mother reports English as her L1. More interestingly, however, student 19 is Tamil and speaks Sinhala as her L1.

All 19 children are in grades 6-8 in Colombo District. While specific details were not disclosed for two participants, just over half (10 of 19) attend government schools, with the remaining students attend a mixture of semi-government (4) and private (3) schools.

While the majority of these children attend multiple L1, L2 and English Elocution tuition classes, all those taking Sinhala L2 tuition are themselves Tamil L1 speakers, while those taking Tamil L2 tuition classes are a mixture of Sinhala and English L1 speakers. Those taking English L2 tuition are either Sinhala or Tamil L1 speakers.

In addition to the parents and guardians, I interviewed the three tutors of the English, Sinhala, and Tamil tuition classes. Some demographic details of the tutors are given in the table below:

Table 3.3

*Demographics of the Tutors*

Tutor	Ethnicity	L1	L2	Age	Number of tutees	Levels of tutees
Sinhala L2 tutor	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	65	Less than 50	Montessori – After A/Ls
Tamil L2 tutor	Tamil	Tamil	Sinhala English	72	30	Grades 1-9
English L2 tutor	Sinhalese	Sinhala	English	40	250	Grades 1-11

As Table 3.3 shows, the tutor's ethnicity closely tracks with their first language. Among the three tutors, the Sinhala and English tutors are both Sinhalese and speak Sinhala as their L1. The Tamil tutor is Tamil and speaks Tamil as her L1. They all speak English as their L2. The Tamil tutor also speaks Sinhala as an L2. The tutors are aged between 40-75.

The number of students that each tutor teaches in total varies greatly. The English L2 tutor has the greatest number of students at 250. The Sinhala L2 tutor has not mentioned a specific number, but an approximate number of students. The Tamil L2 tutor seems to have the least number of students at 30. The Sinhala L2 tutor teaches students starting from Montessori to those who have completed their G.C.E A/Ls. The Tamil L2 tutor teaches students in grades 1-9. The English L2 tutor teaches students in grades 1-11.

The conclusions derived from the data are only limited to the group of parents and guardians in the study. As Buchstaller and Khattab (2013) note, convenience sampling is "limited in its generalizability" (p. 76). Thus, I cannot make any generalized conclusions on the attitudes of the larger Sri Lankan Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim populations towards the learning of Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

### **3.3.1. Participants' ethnolinguistic backgrounds.**

As Table 3.1 shows participants' first language tracks with ethnicity. While this is not always the case in the Sri Lankan society, in this data set, all first language speakers of Sinhala are Sinhalese; all first language speakers of Tamil are Tamil; the first language speaker of English is Muslim.

### **3.3.2. Participants' educational status.**

Participants' level of education also closely tracks with English language ability as shown in Table 3.1. As self-reported, 14 participants whose education level is G.C.E A/L or above are first or second language English speakers, and 6 participants whose education level is below G.C.E. A/L are not first or second language English speakers. Accordingly, participants who have an education level of G.C.E A/L or above speak English, and participants who have an education level below G.C.E A/L do not speak English with two exceptions. One exception is 2-SM whose education level is G.C.E A/L but did not self-report as an English speaker. The G.C.E. A/L examination does not require a passing grade in English but does require the individual to sit the English exam. This would indicate that she has studied English extensively, but does not personally feel her proficiency is high enough to be considered a "speaker" of English. The other exception is 6-SEM whose education level is G.C.E. O/L (below G.C.E A/L) yet she self-reported to be an English speaker. While I do not know very much about 6-SEM's background, I do know that she is a housewife living in a middle-class area of Colombo 5 with her husband, two children and one elderly parent. I do not know for certain, but I suspect her husband holds at least an A/L education and works in a managerial position.

### **3.3.3. Participants' socioeconomic status.**

In Sri Lanka, one's education level, English-speaking ability, and occupation are factors that determine one's socioeconomic status. Middle-class people live in middle-class neighborhoods. Those who have earned a G.C.E A/L qualification or received higher education



and/or employed in managerial or professional jobs gain their entry into the middle class. Most often, in the Sri Lankan patriarchal society, some women who may not have earned a G.C.E A/L qualification or above may gain entry into the middle-class by marrying middle-class men.

In my target group, participants' education level and/or English-speaking ability closely track with their socioeconomic status. I believe the 12 participants whose education level is G.C.E A/L or above and who speak English as a first or second language are middle-class. This judgement is also supported by occupation in some cases. For the 4 participants whose education level is below G.C.E A/L and who do not speak English as a first or second language, I believe their occupation suggests they are working class.

As discussed above, 2-SM self-reports as a non-English speaker, but holds a G.C.E A/L and lives in a middle-class neighborhood with her husband 2-SEF, who holds a G.C.E. A/L, speaks English as a second language, and works as an Assistant Administrative Manager. This participant, 2-SM is solidly middle-class. 6-SEM, on the other hand, holds only a G.C.E. O/L but self-reports as speaking English as a second language. 6-SEM also lives in a middle-class neighborhood in Colombo 5, and I therefore consider her to belong to the middle-class.

Accordingly, participants who have an education level below G.C.E A/L and do not speak English are from a working-class background while participants who have an education level of G.C.E A/L or above and/or speak English are from a middle-class background with one exception. It is noteworthy that all working-class participants are Tamil (7-TSM, 10-TS, 11-TS, and 12-TS) in this group of participants.

An important exception to the relationship between class, language and education is 19-TSG. 19-TSG is a Tamil woman who has not completed school. She does not speak English.

Yet, she has worked her way into the middle class as a business owner. Therefore, she can be considered to be middle-class.

### **3.4. Methods of Data Collection**

After obtaining approval from my university's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), I used the following methods to collect data:

1. A questionnaire (see Canagarajah, 1993; Malalasekera, 2017; Mendis, 2002; Raheem, 2006; Schilling, 2013)
2. Semi-structured interviews (see Bell & Marlow, 2009; Bernard, 2000; Jacobs, 2016)

#### **3.4.1. Questionnaire.**

I used a questionnaire (see Appendix B) to collect demographic information from the participants because I wanted to get a sense of participants' ethnolinguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Schilling (2013) states that "face-to-face surveys" provide more control over respondents than "long distance surveys," especially in terms of obtaining a verification of respondents' demographic information such as age, sex, race (p. 98). Unlike in long distance surveys, the respondents can hardly conceal or provide false demographic information when they fill out the questionnaire in front of the researcher. To get accurate demographic information, I gave the questionnaire to the participants at the preliminary interview.

In some instances, I filled out the questionnaire for the participants asking them for their demographic details. While some participants provided all the information asked for in the demographics form, others refrained from disclosing certain information such as the age or their child's school. Therefore, when creating the tables containing demographic information of the participants in this chapter, I left certain spaces blank.

### **3.4.2. Semi-structured interviews.**

As Bernard (2000) states, semi-structured interviews are based on “an interview guide (a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order),” and that they are suitable for interviewing members of a community who are “accustomed to efficient use of time” (p. 191). Semi-structured interviews also allow for “freewheeling” (Bernard, 2000, p. 191), or the chance to ask spontaneous questions based on the flow of the interview. Using semi-structured interviews to collect data for this study allowed me to plan my guiding questions ahead of time while also allowing me to direct the interview depending on participant responses (see Appendix C). As most parents I interviewed have a tight schedule, the semi-structured interviews also allowed me to make efficient use of both their and my own time.

I intended to conduct both preliminary and follow-up interviews with each participant. I conducted 21 preliminary interviews. Difficulties in scheduling meant I was only able to conduct 8 follow-up interviews to the 21 preliminary interviews. All interviews were conducted face to face.

I had not planned to interview the tutors themselves. However, having had a casual conversation with one of the tutors, I realized that it would be interesting to hear the tutors'

stories about their tuition classes, teaching, and students and understand these stories in relation to parental attitudes. I conducted 3 semi-structured interviews with tutor participants. The interviews with the Sinhala and Tamil tutors were conducted face to face. Due to time constraints, the interview with the English tutor was conducted over WhatsApp audio calling once I returned to the United States. Follow-up interviews were not conducted with tutor participants due to the limitation of time.

**3.4.2.1. Interview process.** Preliminary interviews with parents and guardians were between 10 and 40 minutes each. Follow-up interviews were between 10 and 30 minutes. The tutor interviews were longer, lasting between 32 and 65 minutes each.

I requested the informed consent of the respondents to participate in the research. Accordingly, all participants received informed consent forms in English, Sinhala, and Tamil at the preliminary interview (see Appendix D for the English consent form). I asked the participants to choose the form in the language that they preferred. I used two copies of the same consent form with each participant. First, I gave time for the participants to read the consent form. Once they finished reading, I explained each section of the consent form to them and addressed any questions that they had. Then I asked the participants to sign the two copies of the consent form. I also signed the two copies in front of them. I gave one copy to the participant and kept the other with me.

I explained to participants that they were free not to respond to questions and to withdraw from the interview at any time if they found it uncomfortable. However, no participant refused to respond to questions or withdrew from the interview. I audio-recorded the interviews with the

informed consent of the participants. However, one participant, 6-SEM asked not to be audio-recorded. Relevant notes were made in that case.

During the interviews, I used “probing” (see Bernard, 2000) to encourage participants to provide more information. According to Bernard (2000), “the key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively” (p. 196). He discusses different types of probing (see pp. 196-199). Among several types of probing, I used the following probes:

- the silent probe: remaining quiet and waiting for the informant to continue accompanied by a nod or a mumbled ‘hmm’/‘mm hmm.’
- the echo probe: repeating the last thing someone has said and asking them to continue especially when the interviewee describes an event or a process.
- the tell-me-more probe: probing for more by asking ‘could you tell me more?’, ‘why exactly do you say that?’ and so forth.
- probing by leading: using directive probes based on what the interviewee has finished saying by asking questions such as ‘don’t you think...?’, ‘but what do you think about...?.’

I transcribed all interviews conducted in English. I did not transcribe the interviews that were conducted in Sinhala. To save time, I listened to Sinhala interviews and transcribed a line-by-line translation in English. I received the help of the Tamil tutor to translate the Tamil responses into English in real time. I must acknowledge that meaning might have been lost in translation. My Sinhala-English bilingualism, English language knowledge and skills and expertise in teaching English as a second language and the Tamil tutor’s Sinhala-Tamil-English trilingualism and expertise in teaching Tamil as a second language were a great advantage in producing these translations.

### **3.5. Method of Data Analysis**

I used Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory coding to analyze my data. Charmaz (2006) defines "coding" as "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 43). I believe that the constructivist grounded theory coding fit the study since it enabled analytic interpretations of the participants' qualitative statements expressed in the interviews.

As Charmaz (2006) states, there are at least two main phases in the grounded theory coding: 1) "initial coding" and 2) "focused coding" (p. 46). Initial coding involves "naming each word, line, or segment of data" while focused coding involves using "the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (p. 46).

In the initial coding phase, I named each line of my transcribed/translated data. I invented 28 codes such as disliking Tamil, prioritizing English, speaking in Sinhala, associating English with the upper class, sitting exams and scoring in Tamil, ridiculing Tamil, using Sinhala for daily functioning, elevating English, etc.

As Charmaz (2006) notes, line-by-line coding enables the researcher to identify the nuances of the data and identify the gaps in the data that should be addressed in follow-up interviews. It does not limit the researcher in viewing the data through preconceived theoretical frameworks, nor does it make the researcher accept the participants' responses at face value. Accordingly, line-by-line coding enabled me to "generate a range of ideas and information" about the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 51).

Following the initial coding phase, I used focused coding to assess the initial codes and generate more concrete ideas about the data (Charmaz, 2006). First, I organized the 28 initial

codes by categorizing them into 3 groups, namely competing for positions, discriminating, and reconciling. Then I labelled the 3 groups as primary codes and the 28 original codes as secondary codes.

Using initial and focused coding, I grappled with the data at different levels. Each level gave me a fresh insight into the data. Initial coding allowed me to be “open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by the researcher’s readings of the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Focused coding allowed me “to pinpoint and develop the most salient categories in large batches of data” (Ibid).

Charmaz (2006) states that the process of coding is recursive. I engaged in the process of coding repeatedly. I shared my codes with my graduate advisory committee members, and recoded the data following their feedback many times. As a result of this continuous coding, I ended up narrowing the number of codes to 11. I believe that this recursive coding process enabled me to gain a holistic idea about my data.





## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

In this Chapter, I use the mentalist approach to language attitudes (Appel & Muysekn, 1987; Fasold, 1987; McKenzie, 2010) to investigate participants' attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English, the three languages of the Trilingual Education Policy in Sri Lanka.

As stated in Chapter 1, I do not investigate participant attitudes to their first languages. In other words, I do not investigate Sinhalese participant attitudes to Sinhala and Tamil participants' attitudes to Tamil because my objective was to conduct an empirical investigation of Liyanage and Canagarajah's (2014) and Herath's (2015) claims regarding the likely success of Sinhalese learning Tamil and Tamils learning Sinhala as a second language as required by the Trilingual Education Policy. As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, both Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath (2015) claim that the Trilingual Education Policy will not be successful. Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) states that the demand for English for social mobility and economic prosperity makes the learning of Sinhala and Tamil as a second language less important. According to Herath (2015), learning Sinhala and Tamil as a second language will not be practical due to the persistent mistrust and prejudice between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. To further investigate their claims, I examined participant attitudes to their second languages. In other words, I considered Tamil participants' attitudes to Sinhala and Sinhalese participants' attitudes to Tamil and both Sinhalese and Tamil participants' attitudes to English.

As discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.5, I coded the data using Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory coding. To understand how these codes relate to each other to reveal participant attitudes, I employed the mentalist approach to language attitudes (Chapter 2, section 2.1). Following the mentalist approach, I relied on what participants said in interviews, in other words, their coded self-reports, to infer their attitudes. In Table 4.1 below, I identify 11 codes representing 6 attitudes. These codes and attitudes are organized by language such that Tamil participant attitudes toward Sinhala are given first, Sinhalese attitudes toward Tamil are given second, and attitudes toward English are given third.

Table 4.1

*Codes and Attitudes*

Code	Attitude
Sinhala is necessary for daily functioning.	Sinhala is useful.
Sinhala is necessary to communicate with the Sinhalese.	
Sinhala is necessary for employment.	
Sinhala is liked.	Sinhala is admirable and respectable.
Sinhala is representative of Sri Lankanness.	
Tamil is not useful.	Tamil is not useful.
Tamil test scores are important.	
Tamil is disliked by children.	Tamil is not likeable.
English is a universal/global/international language.	English is useful.
English opens up education and employment prospects.	
English confers status.	English confers status.

In the remainder of this chapter, I demonstrate how I used the mentalist approach to explore participant beliefs, feelings, and actions to infer the participant attitudes given in Table 4.1 above. As discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.1, beliefs, feelings, and actions share a dynamic relationship to form an attitude. A belief is the cognitive component of an attitude; it is a

generalized opinion. A feeling is the affective component of an attitude; it is an emotional response to the attitudinal object. An action is the conative component of an attitude; it is an action or a potential action toward the attitudinal object. Most often, beliefs and feelings in participant statements are somewhat overt while actions maybe implied. In talking about their children's language education, participants often ascribe feelings and actions to their children. As the parents' self-reports are my only data point, I take these statements as a reflection of parental attitudes unless the parent explicitly distances themselves from the reported feeling or action.

The rest of the chapter follows the summary of data in Table 4.1. I discuss Tamil participants' attitudes to Sinhala (4.2), Sinhalese participants' attitudes to Tamil (4.3), and Sinhalese and Tamil participants' attitudes to English (4.4). To discuss these language attitudes, I do not quote all but a few selected statements of participants. I discuss the Muslim participant's attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English separately at the end of the Chapter (4.5) due to two reasons: 1) she is a first language speaker of English unlike other participants who speak Sinhala or Tamil as a first language, and 2) as a member of the Muslim community, she is not part of the two ethnic communities that were central to the ethnic-based civil war in Sri Lanka.

Since I refer to participant pseudonyms throughout this Chapter, it is important to note how I created the pseudonyms. As discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.2, to maintain anonymity, I formed participant pseudonyms based on random numbering of each participant's child. To track the first and second languages of each participant, I used the letters 'S' referring to Sinhala, 'T' referring to Tamil, and 'E' referring to English. Finally, to track the participant's relationship to the child, I used the letters 'M' referring to mother and 'F' referring to father. For example, in the pseudonym 1-SEM, 1 refers to the participant's child (student 1), S refers to the participant's L1 (Sinhala), E refers to the participant's L2 (English), and M refers to the participant's relationship to the child

(mother). Although I did not find any patterns among participants based on gender, I will highlight patterns based on language abilities where relevant in my discussion below.

#### **4.2. Tamil Participants' Attitudes to Sinhala**

Based on participant self-reports, I inferred two attitudes towards Sinhala among my Tamil participants:

1. Sinhala is useful.
2. Sinhala is admirable and respectable.

The table below shows Tamil participants' attitudes to Sinhala, the codes on Sinhala that relate to each attitude, frequency of codes, number of Tamil participants whose statements relate to each code, and participants who made statements related to each code. As the pseudonyms show, all participants speak Sinhala as a second language, and 5 out of these 10 participants speak English as a second language.

Table 4.2

*Tamil Participants' Attitudes to Sinhala*

Attitude	Code	No. of participants	Frequency	Participants
Sinhala is useful.	Sinhala is necessary for daily functioning.	7	10	3-TESM, 7-TSM, 8-TESM, 9-TESM, 12-TSF, 13-TESM, 19-TSG
	Sinhala is necessary to communicate with the Sinhalese.	5	6	7-TSM, 8-TESM, 9-TESM, 12-TSF, 14-TESM
	Sinhala is necessary for employment.	3	5	8-TESM, 10-TSM, 11-TSF
Sinhala is admirable and respectable.	Sinhala is liked.	5	5	3-TESM, 7-TSM, 8-TESM, 13-TESM, 14-TESM
	Sinhala is representative of Sri Lankanness.	2	2	8-TESM, 14-TESM

**4.2.1. Attitude 1: Sinhala is useful.**

Of my Tamil participants, all 10 Tamil participants (3-TESM, 7-TSM, 8-TESM, 9-TESM, 10-TSM, 11-TSF, 12-TSF, 13-TESM, 14-TESM, 19-TSG) have the attitude that Sinhala is useful.

Six participants stated that at least basic skills in reading and writing Sinhala are necessary to “fill out a form” (3-TESM), “read name boards” (7-TSM, 9-TESM), “letters” (3-TESM, 12-TSF), “newspapers” (19-TSG), and “documents in Sinhala” (13-TESM). As 13-TESM noted, “sometimes, application forms and things are only in Sinhala, and not in English, so...[you] should know how to write Sinhala.” All these statements reflect participant beliefs about the use of Sinhala in everyday life. These beliefs also suggest an action: reading and writing Sinhala.

Further, four participants stated that “you need quite a lot of Sinhala to...talk to people” (8-TESM), “people [at the] market” (8-TESM), “neighbors next door” (12-TSF), “people outside” (9-TESM) and “friends” (7-TSM, 14-TESM). To access transportation, “[you] definitely need Sinhala...[especially] to talk...with the [trishaw/three-wheeler] driver” (8-TESM, 9-TESM, 7-TSM). These beliefs also suggest an action: speaking in Sinhala with Sinhala speakers.

Two participants stated that “when you learn...Sinhala, it will be easy to get a job” (11-TSF) and that “you need Sinhala for jobs” (10-TSM). According to 8-TESM, you need to obtain “at least a C pass” for Sinhala at the G.C.E. Ordinary Level Examination “if you are going to practice Law...[in] the government sector” (8-TESM). Again, these statements indicate participant beliefs, but also imply participant actions: taking Sinhala for the G.C.E Ordinary Level Examination and using Sinhala on the job market.

The Sinhala tutor reinforced the need for Sinhala in order for Tamils to gain employment. She explained that for Tamil first language speakers, “getting at least a simple pass for Sinhala is a big thing” because “if they don’t know Sinhala, they can’t do a government job” (Sinhala tutor). Further, “their salary gets increased” if they pass the Sinhala subject at the G.C.E. O/Ls (Sinhala tutor).

As 9-TESM stated, when you travel “anywhere in Sri Lanka, especially when [you] travel to Sinhala [speaking] areas like Anuradhapura, [you] can communicate with people in Sinhala.” According to 8-TESM, “wherever I went...there was so much of Sinhala” and “my language (Sinhala) enhanced by speaking.” According to 14-TESM, “we must learn Sinhala [because] it’s easy to handle when you travel to small villages. [Then] “you don’t need to expect someone else to come and explain about your requirements.” These statements indicate participant beliefs about

the dominance of Sinhala in several geographical locations within the country and imply the participants' action: traveling to Sinhala dominant locales.

The attitude that Sinhala is useful is demonstrated by the Tamil participants' beliefs and actions. They believe that Sinhala is necessary for daily activities, communicating with the Sinhalese, finding employment, and traveling to Sinhala dominant areas in the country. In turn, these beliefs suggest that these participants use Sinhala for reading, writing, speaking, working, and traveling.

#### **4.2.2. Attitude 2: Sinhala is admirable and respectable.**

Of my Tamil participants, 5 out of 10 (3-TESM, 7-TSM, 8-TESM, 13-TESM, 14-TESM) have the attitude that Sinhala is admirable and respectable.

It is important to note that in my experience, I have never heard any Tamils explicitly talking about their admiration or respect towards Sinhala. The fact that so many Tamil participants mentioned it to me during their interviews implies that this may have been an attempt to 'please' me as a Sinhalese majority interviewer.

Four participants expressed that they "like" (8-TESM, 13-TESM) or their children "like Sinhala" (3-TESM, 7-TSM). As 14-TESM stated, "though we are Tamils, we love to speak Sinhala because we respect each and every language." These statements indicate participants' feelings toward Sinhala. I take the statement that children like Sinhala primarily as a reflection of the participant feelings about Sinhala. These participant feelings are extremely positive and imply the participant action: speaking Sinhala.

According to 13-TESM, “I wanted to learn [Sinhala even though] it was not compulsory” at the time, so “I watched a lot of Sinhala dramas, and practiced [Sinhala].” This statement implies the participant’s positive feelings about Sinhala. These feelings drive her actions: learning and practicing Sinhala.

The attitude that Sinhala is liked is demonstrated by the Tamil participants’ feelings, beliefs, and actions. They like Sinhala, believe that their children like Sinhala and act on these feelings and beliefs by learning, practicing, and speaking Sinhala.

#### **4.3. Sinhalese Participants’ Attitudes to Tamil**

Based on participant self-reports, I inferred two attitudes towards Tamil among my Sinhalese participants:

1. Tamil is not useful.
2. Tamil is not likeable.

The table below shows Sinhalese participants’ attitudes to Tamil, the codes on Sinhala that relate to each attitude, frequency of codes, number of Sinhalese participants whose statements relate to each code, and participants who made statements related to each code. As the pseudonyms show, all of these participants but one speak English as a second language. Only one of these participants (5-SETM) also speaks Tamil as a second language. This participant is not shown in Table 4.2 below because her attitude differs considerably from those of my other participants.

Unlike other Sinhalese participants, 5-SETM, speaks Tamil as a second language. According to her, Tamil “is very important.” This her belief about Tamil. She stated that she



“will encourage her [child] to take [Tamil] definitely [as a subject for the G.C.E O/L examination].” Her belief drives her action: encouraging her daughter to learn Tamil. This shows her attitude that Tamil is useful. Her attitude toward Tamil presumably springs from her affinity with the Tamil language. As a child, she lived “in Hatton” where “there are a lot of Tamils, so she had a lot of Tamil friends.” She “went to a mixed school (where) there were Tamil students” (5-SETM). As a result, she “used to speak Tamil in general” although she “cannot read or write Tamil.” In fact, she considers not having learned Tamil in school “a drawback” (5-SETM).

Table 4.3

*Sinhalese Participants’ Attitudes to Tamil*

Attitude	Code	No. of participants	Frequency	Participant pseudonyms
Tamil is not useful.	Tamil is not useful.	7	12	1-SEM, 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEM, 6-SEM, 15-SEM, 16-SEM
	Tamil test scores are important.	5	9	1-SEM, 2-SM, 4-SEF, 16-SEM, 17-SEG
Tamil is not likeable.	Tamil is disliked by children.	7	13	1-SEM, 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEM, 15-SEM, 16-SEM, 17-SEG

**4.3.1 Attitude 1: Tamil is not useful.**

Of my Sinhalese participants, 9 out of 10 (1-SEM, 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEM, 4-SEF, 6-SEM, 15-SEM, 16-SEM, 17-SEG) have the attitude that Tamil is not useful.

According to 2-SM, “Tamil is not a language that we really need...there is no use of it; [therefore], “knowing it a little is enough.” Two participants stated that “Tamil is not much used in society” (2-SEF) and that “Tamil is used only between Tamils and Muslims” (1-SEM). All these statements indicate participant beliefs about the use of Tamil in society; Tamil is used by and within the minority Tamil and Muslim communities. These beliefs imply an action: not using Tamil as majority Sinhalese.

In my view, these beliefs and actions reflect these participants’ privileged position as members of the majority ethnolinguistic community in Sri Lanka. As the majority, Sinhalese can often avoid speaking in Tamil relying on Tamils to switch to Sinhala or English. This privileged position is presumably what informs these participants’ beliefs and potential actions. Tamil is not useful for them because they can function well in their daily lives without Tamil.

Five participants stated that their children “score 100%” (16-SEM, 17-SEG), “above 90%” (1-SEM), “85%” (4-SEF), and “78%” (15-SEM) in Tamil tests. As two participants stated, their children “need to get an average level of marks for Tamil” so that they can “maintain” (2-SM) or “reach a higher rank in the class” (15-SEM). Further, 2-SM stated that “children learn Tamil because they are given marks for the subject.” Similarly, 17-SEG stated that “children just target earning good marks for the Tamil exam paper.” These statements project an action (scoring in Tamil) onto participants’ children, and thereby underscore the parents’ belief that “good marks” are important for their children’s future.

In the competitive school environment in Sri Lanka, students struggle to maintain or reach a higher rank in class. Therefore, they are expected to compete with each other to score well for all subjects. Scoring for Tamil does not necessarily suggest that these children learn Tamil well. Often, tuition classes are geared toward exam performance. In other words, they are

explicitly trained to write the Tamil exam paper and little more. This suggests that these participants do not consider Tamil important to be learned as one of the two national and official languages of the country. The children are expected to score in Tamil just to face the classroom competition.

Further, two Sinhalese participants stated that there is “no issue” [or] “harm” in learning Tamil (1-SEM, 15-SEM). As 1-SEM stated, “I don’t think it [learning Tamil] will be a disadvantage to children because knowing any language is good” (1-SEM). All these statements reflect participant beliefs about need (or lack of need) to learn Tamil. At the same time, these statements imply an action: learning a language. In other words, the learning of a specific language (Tamil) is not particularly important despite its national and official status in the country’s Constitution.

According to five Sinhalese participants, children prefer languages such as “English,” “French,” “Japanese,” or “Chinese” over Tamil (1-SEM, 2-SEF, 4-SEM, 16-SEM) and select such subjects for the G.C.E O/L and A/L examinations (1-SEM, 2-SEF) because “if you study those...languages other than Tamil, it will be good for the future” (2-SEF). These statements reflect children’s potential actions: selecting subjects for the G.C.E O/L and A/L examinations. Again, we see that for these parents, Tamil is considered less important than other languages despite its national and official status in the country’s Constitution.

The point of getting a G.C.E O/L or A/L qualification in a certain subject, at least in part, is to use that qualification on the job market. The implication is that these participants do not need a qualification in Tamil for employment. In fact, I learned from the Tamil tutor that her students discontinue learning Tamil after grade 9 as they are not planning to sit the G.C.E O/L

Tamil exam. As my demographics show, only one participant (5-SETM) I mentioned earlier in this section, speaks Tamil as a second language.

The attitude that Tamil is not useful is demonstrated by the Sinhalese participants' beliefs and actions. Not only do they explicitly express the belief that Tamil is not useful, but their statements further imply that they do not use Tamil in their daily lives, do not consider Tamil important to be learned (other languages are more important) although it is one of the two national/official languages of the country, and do not use Tamil in their workplaces. They expect their children to score in Tamil as a school subject like any other to face the classroom competition.

#### **4.3.2. Attitude 2: Tamil is not likeable.**

Of my Sinhalese participants, 7 out of 10 (1-SEM, 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEM, 15-SEM, 16-SEM, 17-SEG) have the attitude that Tamil is not likeable.

Five participants stated that their children have a “very low” (16-SEM) or absolutely “no interest in learning Tamil” (15-SEM, 16-SEM), children “don’t like Tamil” (1-SEM, 2-SEF), or “do not like to speak Tamil” (1-SEM, 17-SEG). According to two participants, children do not like to speak Tamil because Tamil is “strange, irritating, [and] noisy” (1-SEM) and “totally different” (4-SEM) and “children are not much used to [Tamil] speech” (4-SEM). These statements imply participant beliefs about how their children feel about Tamil, and as these projected feelings are not explicitly countered by parents in my interviews, these statements reflect participant feelings about Tamil. Particularly telling here are the statements that Tamil is

“strange, irritating, [and] noisy” (1-SEM), and “totally different” (4-SEM) as these clearly indicate the participants’ negative feelings towards Tamil.

One mother, 2-SM, reported an incident that involved her friend’s child. She stated that “he had scribbled ‘what is this nonsense (kehelmala)’ and written a zero on the Tamil exam paper” because “learning Tamil had been a nuisance for him... [he felt that] he had been oppressed by having to learn it” (2-SM). Here 2-SM projects a feeling of “oppression” onto the child. As she does not counter this statement, I take this as further evidence of 2-SM’s negative feeling towards Tamil.

The Tamil tutor also felt there is a lack of interest in learning Tamil among Sinhalese children in general. She stated that often her students complain that Tamil is “difficult” for them.

The attitude that Tamil is not likeable is demonstrated by the Sinhalese participants’ feelings, beliefs, and actions. They do not like Tamil and believe their children do not like Tamil. They act on these feelings and beliefs by not using Tamil and not encouraging their children to study Tamil.

#### **4.4. Sinhalese and Tamil Participants’ Attitudes to English**

Based on participant self-reports, I inferred two attitudes towards English among my Sinhalese and Tamil participants:

1. English is useful.
2. English confers status.

The table below shows Sinhalese and Tamil participants’ attitudes to English, the codes on English that relate to each attitude, frequency of codes, number of Sinhalese and Tamil

participants whose statements relate to each code, and participants who made statements related to each code. As the pseudonyms show, 14 out of these participants speak English as a second language, and 5 of them do not. As the table shows, irrespective of their English-speaking ability, participants from both Tamil and Sinhalese communities have the attitude that English is useful and confers status.

Table 4.4

*Sinhalese and Tamil Participants' Attitudes to English*

Attitude	Code	No. of interviewees	Frequency	Participant pseudonyms
English is useful.	English is a universal/global/international language.	19	36	Sinhalese participants: 1-SEM, 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEF, 4-SEM, 5-SETM, 6-SEM, 15-SEM, 16-SEM, 17-SEM Tamil participants: 3-TESM, 7-TSM, 8-TESM, 9-TESM, 10-TSM, 11-TSF, 13-TESM, 14-TESM, 19-TSG
	English opens up education and employment prospects.	7	7	Sinhalese participants: 1-SEM, 2-SEF, 4-SEM, 5-SETM Tamil participants: 8-TESM, 10-TSM, 19-TSG
English confers status.	English confers status.	5	8	Sinhalese participants: 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEF, 4-SEM Tamil participant: 12-TSF

#### **4.4.1. Attitude 1: English is useful.**

Of my Sinhalese and Tamil participants, 19 out of 20 have the attitude that English is useful. Among the 19 participants are 10 Sinhalese participants (1-SEM, 2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEF, 4-SEM, 5-SETM, 6-SEM, 15-SEM, 16-SEM, 17-SEM) and 9 Tamil participants (3-TESM, 7-TSM, 8-TESM, 9-TESM, 10-TSM, 11-TSF, 13-TESM, 14-TESM, 19-TSG).

As these participants stated, “English is necessary wherever you go...” (2-SM, 2-SEF), “in every country...for everyone” (19-TSG) “because it is a universal” (8-TESM), “international” (4-SEF, 6-SEM, 15-SEM, 13-TESM), “world” (17-SEM), or “global language” (8-TESM). They further stated that when you speak English, you “can survive at any place...” (8-TESM), “go anywhere and get anything done...” (2-SM). 16-SEM stated that when you “go abroad...mostly English is used.” 8-TESM even claimed that without English, “you cannot do anything.” 2-SM stated that “giving much priority to the language [English] that [you] can use anywhere is better.” These statements reflect participant beliefs about the wide use of English and imply the participants’ action: using English.

As 14-TESM stated, “when foreigners come [to your country], you can speak to them in English.” According to 4-SEF, you can communicate in English with “80% of people in the world” (4-SEF). These statements indicate the participants’ belief that English is appropriate for communicating with foreigners and imply action: communicating in English with foreigners.

Further, 2-SEF stated that living in “a multicultural country” like Sri Lanka, means “when you move with each other, you speak in English.” As 2-SM stated, “everything is fine” as long as “the Tamil person also learns English, [and] the Sinhala person also learns English...” These statements reflect the belief that English is used for intranational communication and

imply the action: speaking in English with other ethnic communities. The English tutor also reinforced the importance of English for inter-ethnic communication:

The severe war condition in Sri Lanka and the ethnic problems...came up because [people] could not understand each other very well...if children know English very well, they all will get a chance to communicate and we won't get such problems in Sri Lanka in future.

Four participants explained that English is central to their children's "future needs" (5-SETM, 9-TESM, 19-TSG) in both education and employment. According to 2-SEF, "advanced knowledge can be extracted mostly from books that are in English." As 4-SEM stated, "when [children] do [their] higher studies...[they] will need English." As 8-TESM stated, you need English when "flying abroad to study." Two participants claimed that children must "study English well because it is important for a job" (1-SEM) and "you need English more for jobs" (10-TSM). These statements reflect the belief that English is the language of education and employment and imply the use of English in education, on the job market, and at workplaces.

As 8-TESM further stated, children "find English really easy" since "the era is about technology." According to 13-TESM, "everything children read [such as] Secret Seven, Percy Jackson, Harry Potter...is in English." These statements reflect the belief that English is the language of technology and popular culture. The participants are projecting on to their children's feelings and actions to express this belief. These statements also imply the participants' actions: using English for technological purposes and to enjoy popular culture. As the English tutor explained, children "deal with English...whenever they use their phones, read, enjoy singing [and] dancing..."



As 3-TESM stated, “without English...[you] cannot live in the country [Sri Lanka]” (3-TESM). For example, 7-TSM stated that “when you go somewhere...like the hospital, you have to speak in English.” According to 8-TESM, English is especially “very influential...in Colombo,” the commercial capital of Sri Lanka; “English is the language that is mostly used in Colombo” (15-SEM), “even by children” (6-SEM, 11-TSF). For 15-SEM, English is so important in Colombo that learning English changed her “life when [she] came from the village to Colombo” to pursue her nursing career. These statements reflect the belief that English is used throughout the country, especially in Colombo, the commercial capital of Sri Lanka. The statements suggest a participant action: using English to function in Colombo.

As the English tutor explained English is so widespread that “English has become a fashion...in [the] country” to the extent that children “tend to communicate more in English than in their mother tongue” (English tutor).

The attitude that English is useful is demonstrated by the Sinhalese and Tamil participants’ beliefs and actions. They believe that English is useful as an international/global/universal language widely used particularly as a language of international and intranational communication, education, employment, technology, and popular culture. They also believe that English is useful for functioning in Colombo. These same participants are likely to act on this belief by communicating in English internationally and intranationally, using English for technological purposes, studying in English, using English on the job market and at workplaces.

#### **4.4.2. Attitude 2: English confers status.**

Of my Sinhalese and Tamil participants, 5 out of 20 participants have the attitude that English confers status. Among the 5 participants are, 4 Sinhalese participants (2-SM, 2-SEF, 4-SEF, 4-SEM) and 1 Tamil participant (12-TSF).

These participants stated that “you’re recognized when you speak in English” (2-SEF) because the “recognized language is English” (2-SM) and people “[give] more recognition to English” (4-SEM). All these statements suggest the belief that English is a status maker and imply the participants’ action: speaking in English to signal status.

As 12-TSF stated, “if some rich man comes and asks us something, we don’t know how to respond...[if our children learn English] we can at least ask our children what that man says.” This statement suggests the belief that the rich speak English. As a working-class individual, this participant has access to English only through his children who learn English. The statement implies 12-TSF’s sense of inferiority because he is unable to speak in English. By gaining access to English for his children, the participant believes he can overcome some of that inferiority.

The attitude that English confers status is demonstrated by the Sinhalese and Tamil participants’ beliefs, feelings, and actions. They believe that English confers status. Those who cannot speak English are considered inferior to English speakers.

#### **4.5. The Muslim Participant’s Attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English**

The Muslim participant’s (18-ESTM) child receives Tamil L2 tuition from the Tamil tutor in this study. Her child attends a private school in the Colombo district. She is in grade 8,

speaks English at home and learns Sinhala as a first language and English and Tamil as second languages in school. This means that this child studies Sinhala language and literature with other Sinhala first language students in school. At the time of this research, she attended a Sinhala L1 tuition class as well as an English Elocution class.

As I will show, the Muslim participant holds similar attitudes to my Sinhalese participants regarding the value of Tamil, Tamil participants regarding the value of Sinhala and both communities regarding English.

The Muslim participant stated that “the majority of Muslim people are able to speak Tamil” and that as a Muslim, she “can speak Tamil very fluently, but [she] cannot read and write it” (18-ESTM). She explained that because the majority of Muslims are able to speak the language, “Muslim people [have typically gotten] along with the Tamils.” These statements demonstrate a belief that Tamil is necessary for in-group communication within the Sri Lankan Muslim community, and may be useful for intra-group communication between Muslims and Tamils. However, these statements might also suggest that the usefulness of Tamil is limited to within and across these groups. Therefore, these beliefs imply an action on the participant’s part (and by extension the Muslim and Tamil communities): speaking Tamil to other Tamil speakers. However, as the implied action is limited to Tamil speakers, these beliefs broadly agree with those held by my Sinhalese participants, that is that Tamil is not useful for Sinhalese participants.

She further stated that Tamil is “an accepted language” and “is used in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, [and] Canada” (18-ESTM). As she explained, in such countries, “[Tamil is] more like the second or third language [just] like French or Spanish” (18-ESTM). It must be noted that each of these countries (Malaysia, Singapore, Canada) is home to Tamil diasporic communities, whether resulting from families fleeing the Sri Lankan civil war or from earlier

British colonial rule. These statements suggest an extension of the belief that Tamil is useful for in-group communication within the Tamil diasporic communities. As in the case discussed above, these beliefs imply an action: speaking Tamil to other Tamil speakers.

Like the Tamil participants, the Muslim participant holds the attitude that Sinhala is useful. She stated that she can “read and write [Sinhala] to a certain extent” (18-ESTM). This statement suggests an action: to live in a Sinhala dominant locale, the Muslim participant needs Sinhala reading and writing skills just as the Tamil participants who claimed that they need Sinhala reading and writing skills to fill out forms, read documents and name boards and so forth.

The Muslim participant goes on to make a comparison between Sinhala, Tamil and English. Unlike other participants, the Muslim participant equates Sinhala and Tamil when she stated, “you need Sinhala and Tamil for aesthetic purposes - to enjoy the music, the literature, the art in your country...” (18-ESTM). At the same time, however, she stated that her children “make very little effort to read any books or watch anything in Sinhala [or]... Tamil” and they are “more comfortable depending on the English language because they watch... Disney movies” (18-ESTM). In fact, as she stated, her first child “is managing [Sinhala], but is not able to communicate so well in [Sinhala]” (18-ESTM). These statements suggest the belief that while Sinhala and Tamil maybe useful for aesthetic purposes, these uses are primarily for in-group use. As a self-identified English first language speaker, English fulfills these roles for her own children. In fact, as with both Sinhala and Tamil participants, the Muslim participant considers English an “international language” that is useful for her children’s “future needs” in education and employment. She further stated that “...if you are to put yourself on an equal platform globally you cannot do [that] without English” (18-ESTM). These statements suggest a

distinction regarding the relative value of Sinhala and Tamil for “local” aesthetic pursuits and English for work or competition on a global stage. Her reference to competing on “an equal platform” suggests her belief that English is necessary to achieve upward social mobility.

The Muslim participant also reinforces the Sinhalese and Tamil participants’ attitude that English confers status. She stated that “laundry girls...feel happy to speak in English rather than...in Tamil because they feel that...there is some recognition..., acceptance..., [and] superiority...” and that when you “speak to a nurse in English they feel elevated; [when] you speak to some waiter in English, they struggle, but they want to speak...because...if they can speak in English they feel a bit more...accepted in society” (18-ESTM). All these statements indicate her beliefs about the recognition and status achieved by speaking in English. She projects the feelings of happiness, recognition, and acceptance through English onto the launderers, nurses, and waiters who she considers working class individuals, and who she feels she has honored by speaking in English with/to them.

Unlike the Sinhalese and Tamil participants, the Muslim participant holds the attitude that English is a neutral language that enables inter-ethnic unity. She claims that Sri Lanka has “to go back to the British system...making English the primary language [of education].” As she explained, even though her parents “cannot read or write Sinhala or Tamil ..., they are more united...[and] they don’t have racial views. [Instead], they are more empathetic” because “their education was in English” (18-ESTM). Together, these statements suggest her belief that English is a neutral language, which is valued both locally and translocally. As such, she believes that English medium education would lead to inter-ethnic unity.

## 4.6. Discussion

As I have shown, Tamil participants hold the attitude that Sinhala is useful, admirable and respectable. With a single exception, Sinhalese participants view Tamil as neither useful nor likeable. Finally, both groups of participants view English as useful and conferring status. Further, these attitudes are largely confirmed by my Muslim participant who considers Tamil useful for in-group communication only, Sinhala useful for daily functioning and English useful for education, employment, inter-ethnic communication and international competition. While she expressed no particular like or dislike for either Tamil or Sinhala (both are ‘useful’ for esthetic purposes), she considered English an important marker of status.

Table 4.5

### *Participant Attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English*

Participants	Language	Attitudes	Beliefs/Feelings/Actions
Tamil participants	Sinhala	Sinhala is useful.	Reading, writing, speaking, finding employment, traveling
		Sinhala is admirable and respectable.	Liking, loving, respecting
Sinhalese participants	Tamil	Tamil is not useful.	Not using, scoring
		Tamil is not likeable.	Disliking, not speaking
Sinhalese and Tamil participants	English	English is useful.	Speaking, using for technological purposes, studying, working, functioning in Colombo
		English confers status.	Speaking, feeling recognized, feeling inferior, gaining access to English
Muslim participant	Sinhala	Sinhala is useful.	Reading, writing, speaking, appreciating local cultural aesthetics
	Tamil	Tamil is useful.	Speaking Tamil to other Tamil speakers, appreciating local cultural aesthetics
	English	English is useful.	Competing globally

Table 4.5 (Continued)

*Participant Attitudes to Sinhala, Tamil, and English*

		English confers status.	Feeling happy, accepted, recognized, and elevated
		English is a neutral language for inter-ethnic unity.	Learning in English

As a cursory glance shows, the term ‘useful’ appears multiple times in Table 4.5 above: Sinhala is useful, Tamil is not useful, and English is useful. Since constructivist grounded theory asks the researcher to continuously code and recode the data, I decided to regroup these three attitudes under the theme ‘usefulness’. This recoding further suggested I take a closer look at the remaining three attitudes: Sinhala is admirable and respectable; Tamil is not likeable; English confers status. I then reviewed the key terms admirable, likeable, and status in a thesaurus to see how closely they might overlap in English. I decided to group all three attitudes under the theme of ‘regard’ because all three attitudes can be related to the level of esteem or regard participants expressed for each language.

#### **4.6.1. Usefulness.**

As the name suggests, usefulness refers to the extent to which participants consider the language beneficial in their real or imagined daily lives. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my Tamil participants reported daily use of Sinhalese, while Sinhala participants reported little or no functional use of Tamil. Both groups reported that English is/would be beneficial for them, regardless of whether or not they themselves are able to speak the language. Taken together, the three languages appear to be on a usefulness continuum with Tamil occupying one end (useful

only for in-group communication) and English the other (useful for both national and international communication).

My own experience as a Sinhalese in many ways confirms these attitudes. As a Sinhalese woman living in the Colombo District, I have always expected Tamils I interact with to know Sinhala to whatever extent necessary to successfully complete the interaction. Underlying this expectation is the common perception that Tamils, at least in Colombo, are able to function in Sinhala. Further, when I was in school learning Tamil, I often saw and heard my own classmates saying Tamil is not useful. Since my childhood, I have often been advised by my parents and teachers about the usefulness of English. As a former ESL teacher in Sri Lanka, I have also come across many Sinhalese and Tamil students who were keen on improving their English saying it is useful for them in the future.

#### **4.6.2. Regard.**

As I have already stated, the theme regard is intended to capture the level of esteem participants expressed for each language. As discussed earlier in the chapter, my Tamil participants reported that they hold Sinhala in high regard (admirable, respectable), while my Sinhalese participants hold Tamil in low regard (not likeable), and both groups again hold English in high regard (conferring status). As in the theme of usefulness, the three languages appear to sit on a continuum of regard with Tamil at one end and English at the other.

My own experience as a Sinhalese woman confirms some of these findings. In school, many of my Sinhalese classmates disliked learning Tamil. Since my childhood, friends, family and classmates have often expressed the idea that speakers of English have a higher social status.



Interestingly this status marking is so high that many of my middle-class female friends consider the ability to speak in English one of the requirements for an eligible bachelor. While half of my Tamil participants (5 of 10) expressed very high regard for Sinhala as an admirable or respectable language, prior to conducting this research, I had never before heard this expressed. The fact that so many Tamil participants mentioned it to me during their interviews suggests to me that this may have been an attempt to ‘please’ me as a Sinhalese majority interviewer.

In the next chapter, I analyze these themes of usefulness and regard in participant attitudes further to understand what these themes suggest in terms of the likely success of the policy in reconciling the Sinhalese and Tamils.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Postwar Reconciliation: The Likely Success of The Policy**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I identified two themes related to participant attitudes: usefulness and regard. I showed that the Tamil participants find Sinhala useful in daily life and employment and have regard for Sinhala as an admirable and respectable language. In contrast, the Sinhalese participants do not find Tamil useful in their lives and have no regard for the language. Both groups of participants find English useful in education and employment both locally and translocally and regard the language as a status marker.

In this chapter, I draw on two concepts, Bourdieu's (1991) capital and Skutnabb-Kangas's (1988, 2016) linguisticism, to understand what these parental attitudes, in other words, these themes of usefulness and regard imply about the likely success of the Trilingual Education Policy in reconciling the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in postwar Sri Lanka.

I conclude the chapter by considering Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath's (2015) explanations for why they believe the trilingual education policy is likely to fail.

#### **5.2. Analysis and Discussion**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu (1991) notes that "on a given linguistic market, some products are valued more highly than others" (p. 18). In other words, certain languages, language varieties, or dialects can have more value than others in different contexts or societies.

This value attached to a language, language variety, or dialect is called “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991). Writing about different forms of capital, Bourdieu (1991) explains that one type of capital can be transformed into another type of capital. Accordingly, “linguistic capital” can be converted into “economic,” “cultural” and/or “symbolic capitals.” Cultural capital includes various “cultural acquisitions” such as education, knowledge, and skills. Economic capital includes different forms of “material wealth.” Symbolic capital includes “accumulated prestige or honor” (Bourdieu, 1991. p.14). Different types of capital are available in different social contexts. Bourdieu (1991) refers to such a context as a “field, game, or market.” Acting within these field, individuals control different quantities of capital necessary to survive or thrive within a particular field.

In brief, linguistic capital is the value attached to a certain language. One type of capital can be converted to other types of capital. Therefore, linguistic capital can be converted to cultural capital (knowledge, skills, education), economic capital (monetary possessions), and symbolic capital (prestige and honor).

The theme of usefulness in participant attitudes can be understood in terms of Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of capital. The Tamil participants’ attitude that Sinhala is useful signals that Sinhala has capital, particularly cultural capital in daily life and economic capital in employment for them. In contrast, the Sinhalese participants’ attitude that Tamil is not useful signals that Tamil has no capital in their lives. Both groups have the attitude that English is useful. This signals that English has capital, particularly cultural capital in education and economic capital in employment in both local and translocal fields for them. This cultural and economic capital gained through English can be converted to symbolic capital by gaining upward social mobility.

In short, Tamil has no capital for the Sinhalese participants, Sinhala has cultural capital and economic capital for the Tamil participants. They may convert that cultural and economic capital to symbolic capital in local fields of action. English has cultural and economic capital for both groups of participants both locally and translocally. They may convert that cultural and economic capital to symbolic capital in both local and translocal fields of action. This means that to achieve upward social mobility, the Tamil participants need both Sinhala and English as second languages while the Sinhalese participants only need English as a second language.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2016) also draws on the concept of capital in her discussion of linguicism:

People's linguistic capital in ITM [indigenous, tribal, minority, and minoritized] languages is often treated as invisible or even a handicap. When such competence is invalidated, it is constructed as a nonresource and cannot be converted into other types of capital. (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2016, p. 586)

Accordingly, Skutnabb-Kangas (2016) states that "linguicism" is evident when people's linguistic capital in indigenous, tribal, minority, or minoritized languages is not valued and seen as not lending itself to other types of capital. She defines linguicism as using language in order to maintain or reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between different language groups in a given society (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2016).

As Skutnabb-Kangas (2016) goes on to explain that this unequal power relationship may result in the "glorification" of a majority group and its language and the "stigmatization" and "devaluation" of the minority group and its language. This majority-minority relationship is then "rationalized economically, politically, psychologically, educationally, sociologically, and linguistically" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2016, p. 584). The theme of regard in participant attitudes can

be understood in terms of Skutnabb-Kangas's (2016) idea of glorification and stigmatization. The Tamil participants regard Sinhala as an admirable and respectable language. This signals a glorification of Sinhala. The Sinhalese participants have no regard for Tamil. For them, Sinhala is not likeable. This signals a stigmatization of Tamil. Both groups of participants regard English as a language that confers status. In other words, both groups of participants glorify English.

This exceptionally high regard for English appears to create a scale of regard with English at the top, Sinhala in the middle and Tamil at the bottom. This scale of regard may be understood in terms of the relative capital each language carries for particular fields. Sinhalese is the majority language of Sri Lanka and is required for (= capital) daily functioning and employment in Colombo, a Sinhalese dominated area, and government and national industry (= fields). Tamil, in turn, is the minority language and although formally required for some government and industry jobs, it is functionally required (= capital) only in Tamil dominated areas (= field) and for in-group communication. Finally, English is required (= capital) on both international and national stages oriented toward the international market (= field).

To recap, all participant attitudes reflect what Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, 2016) calls linguicism. As stated earlier in this chapter, linguicism occurs when people's linguistic capital in minority languages is not valued and seen as not lending itself to other types of capital as well as when people glorify the majority group and its language and stigmatize and devalue the minority group and its language. Linguicism in participant attitudes is apparent in these respects: The Sinhalese participants devalue and stigmatize Tamil, the minority language, as a language that has neither capital nor regard in their lives, while the Tamil participants value and glorify Sinhala, the majority language as a language that has cultural, economic and by extension, symbolic capital and regard in their lives; both the Sinhalese and Tamil participants value and

glorify English as a language that has cultural, economic, and symbolic capital in both local and translocal fields for them. Because English is believed to provide more symbolic capital to participants than Sinhala or Tamil both locally and translocally, the regard for English is higher than for Sinhala or Tamil. This signals the dominance of English in relation to Sinhala and Tamil as the language of the colonizer and the primary language of the powerful United States. In other words, this reflects the English linguistic imperialist ideology.

Philipson (1992) explains that English linguistic imperialism is a “sub-type” of linguicism (p. 47). He defines English linguistic imperialism as asserting and maintaining the dominance of English through “structural and cultural inequalities” between English and other languages (p. 47). He further explains that structural inequalities are those which are established and maintained by “material properties” such as institutions and financial allocation and that cultural inequalities are those which are established and maintained by “immaterial or ideological properties” such as attitudes and pedagogic principles (p. 47).

As Philipson (1992) argues, three types of arguments are used to promote English: 1) “English-intrinsic arguments (what English is - capacities),” 2) “English-extrinsic arguments (what English has - resources),” and 3) “English-functional arguments (what English does - uses)” (p. 271). Philipson (1992) explains:

English intrinsic arguments describe English as rich, varied, noble, well adapted for change, interesting, etc. English extrinsic arguments refer to textbooks, dictionaries, grammar books, rich literature, trained teachers, experts, etc. English functional arguments credit English with real or potential access to modernization, science, technology, etc., with the capacity to unite people within a country and across nations, or with the furthering of international understanding. (Philipson, 1992, pp. 271-272)

For example, when my participants say English is modern or elegant, they are making English intrinsic arguments; when they refer to the use of English study materials or the use of English in media and popular culture, they are making English extrinsic arguments; when they claim that English gives access to better education and employment prospects, they are making English functional arguments.

Philipson (1992) states that these arguments come to be seen as “common-sensical” as the English linguistic imperialist ideology becomes normalized (p. 8). He states that dominated groups glorify English as they internalize the “capacities,” “resources,” and “uses” of English and contribute to the maintenance of the English linguistic imperialist ideology. He further explains that English was imposed on people in colonized countries forcefully during the colonial era, but in the post-colonial era, the linguistic imperialist ideology has been “so persuasive that English has been equated with progress and prosperity” (p. 8). In the post-colonial context, people have come to believe that English enables socio-economic mobility. In that belief, people especially in post-colonial countries such as Sri Lanka, continue to valorize and glorify English as the language of the colonizer and the primary language of the most powerful nation in the world, the United States.

Philipson’s (1992) analysis of “imperialist” English can be extended to “majority-ist”<sup>3</sup> Sinhala as the dominant language of Sri Lanka. As my discussion below aims to show, Tamil participants internalize “capacities,” “resources,” and “uses” of Sinhala and thereby contribute to

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<sup>3</sup> I have explicitly avoided using the term “nationalist” here in my description of Sinhala. While the term may be appropriate, given the proper definitions, caveats and interpretations, in the post-war Sri Lankan context limitations of time and space disallow that discussion here.



the maintenance of a Sinhalese dominant ideology in the country. I find the following Tamil participant statements significant to show how such Sinhalese majority-Tamil minority relationships are rationalized through internalized Sinhala-intrinsic, Sinhala-extrinsic, and Sinhala-functional arguments.

The Tamil participant, 12-TSF is a working-class father living and working in Colombo as a shop assistant. As the pseudonym indicates, he is a second language speaker of Sinhala, but does not speak English. During his interview, he explained how important it was for him, as a Tamil living in Colombo, to learn Sinhala during the civil war:

During the times we had issues in Sri Lanka, we were caught by the police, and we were unable to communicate with them. Now, wherever we go, we know how to talk [in Sinhala] and come back... I did not know Sinhala in the past. After I came to Colombo and made friends with people, I started speaking [Sinhala] (12-TSF).

This participant's anecdote exemplifies Sinhala-extrinsic and Sinhala-functional arguments and reflects the attitude that Sinhala is useful. As 12-TSF explains, during the war if a Tamil man could not communicate with the police and explain his comings and goings he could not truly move freely in Colombo. Here, the Tamil participant's act of learning Sinhala is seen as an act of survival and normalized as what is required in order to live in a Sinhala dominated area.

Another Tamil participant, 16-TESM is a middle-class house wife and a mother living in Colombo. As the pseudonym indicates, she is a second language speaker of English and Sinhala. During her interview, she explained her reasons for learning Sinhala as a Sri Lankan:

"We must learn Sinhala because our history in Sri Lanka is mainly based on Sinhala kings" (16-TESM).

This participant's statement exemplifies a Sinhala-intrinsic argument and reflects the attitude that Sinhala is admirable and respectable. In my view, the belief that Sri Lanka is mainly based on Sinhala kings reinforces Mendis's (2002) finding. Mendis (2002) found that 45.2% of Tamils referred to Sinhala as the only national language in Sri Lanka suggesting that Tamils are "accustomed to thinking of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala nation" (p. 171).

Participant 19-TSG is a middle-class grandmother who owns her own laundry business. As the pseudonym indicates, she is a second language speaker of Sinhala, but does not speak English. Even though she is Tamil, she is raising her granddaughter as a first language speaker of Sinhalese. Her granddaughter attends a Sinhalese Buddhist school in Colombo and studies Sinhala as a first language in school and Tamil as a second language. In her interview, she stated:

"I do not speak to her in Tamil because then she would get used to my language [Tamil]" (19-TSG).

This participant's statement exemplifies a Sinhala functional argument although it is not overt and reflects the attitude that Sinhala is useful, for it implies that the participant speaks to her granddaughter only in Sinhala. I feel the belief that her granddaughter will have more capital and therefore be more likely to succeed in school, work and life underlies 19-TSG's choice to raise her granddaughter as a Sinhalese first language speaker.

### **5.3. Conclusion**

As stated in Chapter 1, section 1.4, my objective was to conduct an empirical investigation into the likelihood that the Trilingual Education policy will succeed. As part of that

investigation, I am particularly interested in the claims of Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) and Herath (2015). They are the only authors known to me who have written explicitly on this topic.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, both Herath (2015) and Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) argue that national reconciliation through Trilingual Education is unlikely to succeed. For Herath (2015), the continued prejudice and mistrust between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities simply makes learning the other community's language unlikely. For Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014), the current geopolitical trends that require Sri Lankans to master English for economic prosperity and social mobility makes the policy unlikely to succeed.

While both Mendis (2002) and Raheem (2006) reported "encouraging trends in communal harmony and linguistic tolerance" (p. 25) between Sinhala and Tamil educators and students, these studies predate the Trilingual Education policy. My own findings support Liyanage & Canagarajah's (2014) and Herath's (2015) conclusions that the Trilingual Education Policy is ineffective and unlikely to bring about national reconciliation. While I agree with the general conclusion that the Trilingual Education Policy is unlikely to succeed, I do so for my own reasons. While both Herath (2015) and Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) provide common sense conclusions, neither provides empirical data to support those arguments.

Herath's (2015) view appears to be supported by the history of ethnic conflict and 26 years of civil war in Sri Lanka. However, in my data I did not find evidence of mistrust between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. Hence, I believe that the challenge for national reconciliation through Sinhala/Tamil bilingualism among Sinhalese and Tamil communities does not result from the mistrust between the two communities. It is a result of linguisticism. I do not disagree with Herath's (2015) claim that there is prejudice; linguisticism is a form of prejudice.

However, my data suggests this linguistic prejudice is not mutual between the two communities as Herath (2015) claims. It is a question of the majority-minority relationship.

Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) link English to economic prosperity and social mobility in Sri Lanka. Few researchers would deny the pull of English in Sri Lanka. Raheem and Gunasekera (1996) have demonstrated that English functions as a working official language in both private and government sector employment; Künstler et al. (2009) found that Sri Lankan English speakers see English as a tool for socioeconomic advancement and intranational communication; and Ratwatte (2011) found that college students consider English as necessary for education, employment and as a means of attaining social prestige. Liyanage and Canagarajah's (2014) view is also supported by my findings. For the majority of Sinhalese and Tamil participants, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, English carries the cultural capital necessary to function in local and translocal fields, especially in education. That cultural capital is convertible to economic capital in employment and to symbolic capital by achieving upward social mobility locally and/or translocally. Because English gives them symbolic capital, they valorize and glorify English.

However, it is an oversimplification to say the value attached to English is simply the result of "current geopolitical trends" (Liyanage & Canagarajah, 2014). The valorization of English in Sri Lanka is partly a product of its colonial past. As mentioned in Chapter 2, since independence, perhaps even before, English has been referred to as *kaduwa* or sword in Sri Lanka. As Kandiah (1984) explains, as a sword, English symbolizes power and prestige and demarcates English speakers from non-English speakers in terms of social class, position, power and control. In other words, English carries the symbolic power necessary for upward social mobility in the stratified Sri Lankan society. It has done so since the British colonial rule. Simply

put, the “current geopolitical trends” that Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014) refer to are an extension of Sri Lanka’s, and the world’s colonial legacy.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Recommendations and Future Research**

#### **6.1. Recommendations**

Given a capital-oriented analysis, achieving Sinhala/Tamil bilingualism through the Trilingual Education Policy, requires the government to provide incentives to learning Sinhala and Tamil. I believe that providing incentives may inculcate instrumental motivation among people for learning the language of the other ethnic group. However, as I explained in Chapters 1 and 2, language attitudes are really attitudes towards speakers of those languages. If the goal is to reconcile the Sinhalese and Tamil communities through the teaching of each other's languages, the government must find ways not just to create nominal capital, but meaningful social interaction between members of both ethnic groups on an equal footing. In other words, it is important to inculcate integrative motivation among people for learning the language of the other ethnic group.

While the current policy provides such incentives insofar as all three languages are required for government sector employment in Sri Lanka, this requirement is not equally applied to all three languages, for Tamil is not firm enough at present. In my experience, Sinhala and English are both functionally required for government sector employment, while Tamil is only nominally required. I personally know Sinhalese employees in the government sector who function well without Tamil language skills. It is important to strengthen the requirement for Tamil in employment to enhance the capital of Tamil.

English for both Sinhalese and Tamil students is a compulsory subject for both G.C.E O/L and A/L examinations and a requirement for managerial and professional jobs in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, students formally study English from grades 1 through 13, and hundreds of students, even those preparing for A/L examinations, seek private tuition classes each year with the English tutor I interviewed.

Sinhala for Tamil students is not mandatory for either G.C.E O/L and A/L examinations, but it is a requirement for most jobs in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, students formally study Sinhala from grades 1 through 9, and many students, even after leaving school, seek private tuition classes each year with the Sinhala tutor I interviewed in order to prepare to sit the G.C.E O/L Sinhala examination.

Tamil for Sinhalese students is not mandatory for either G.C.E O/L and A/L examinations, and it is not a requirement for most jobs in Sri Lanka. Students formally study Sinhala from grades 1 through 9. Almost all students discontinue learning Tamil after grade 9 as the Tamil tutor I interviewed stated. She referred to instances where the students expressed their displeasure in having to learn Tamil.

As a first step in overcoming this inequity, policy makers must collaborate with the Education Ministry to give equal recognition to the languages taught in school. Making Sinhala and Tamil compulsory subjects for the G.C.E O/L may enhance the capital ascribed to Tamil at least in the context of education. There need to be opportunities to continue learning Sinhala and Tamil just like English up until grade 13 and sit a collaborative language exam in all three languages rather than sitting an English exam at the G.C.E A/L exam. Moreover, university credits can be offered to students for having the G.C.E O/L and G.C.E A/L qualifications in all three languages. That could be an incentive for the students to become trilingual.



The question is, will these idealistic recommendations drive away the Sinhalese prejudice toward Tamil? I believe that one of the crucial factors that contribute to this kind of prejudice is the ethnically and/or religiously segregated school system in Sri Lanka where the two communities learn Sinhala or Tamil separately. Some examples of such ethnically and/or religiously segregated schools in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese Buddhist, Tamil Hindu, Catholic, and Islamic schools.

I believe that it is important to create a field where Sinhalese and Tamil students come together through inter-school language festivals. Creating such bilingual bicultural learning spaces at the school level may help to minimize ethnolinguistic prejudices among the children. The Tamil tutor stated that in the kindergarten that she teaches, the Sinhalese and Tamil students speak both Tamil and Sinhala, for they engage in Sinhala and Tamil related language activities such as reciting poems, listening to stories, coloring alphabet letters and so forth. She sees a stark contrast in the attitudes to Tamil among her Sinhalese kindergarten students and older Sinhalese students who attend her Tamil tuition class. This example shows the importance of taking a cultural approach to teaching Tamil and Sinhala to the Sinhalese and Tamil respectively.

Advocating dual language bilingual education programs where majority and minority language students learn half of the curriculum in the minority language and the other half in the majority language is another way to overcome stigmatization and devaluation of minority languages. Such bilingual education programs equally value both majority and minority languages as media of instruction and give students the opportunity to develop their knowledge in both languages as they learn curricula. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the only Sinhalese participant who has the attitude that Tamil is useful is 5-SETM. I mentioned in Chapter 4 that this is presumably because she grew up in a Tamil dominant locale (Hatton) and attended a

mixed school where there were both Sinhalese and Tamil students. While 5-SETM did not go on to explain if she learned in the same classroom with the Tamil students, this example raises the importance of dual language programs in helping children to grow up with equal regard for both Sinhala and Tamil.

In my view, both the creation of bicultural and bilingual learning spaces at the school level and implementing dual language bilingual education programs may give room to both the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil children to learn the language of the other ethnic group with an integrative motivation rather than with the instrumental motivation that currently underlies their actions. Inculcating such integrative motivation in children to learn the language of the other ethnic group is therefore important. That is key to reconciling the two communities through language education.

## **6.2. Future Studies**

It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study cannot be generalized. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this study was conducted in Colombo 5 in Sri Lanka. All participants reside and/or work in the Colombo district, and their children attend schools in the Colombo district where Sinhala is dominant. It is imperative to investigate whether the attitudes of the participants in this study are prevalent in other locales where the Tamil language, and not Sinhala is dominant. Further, in this study, I did not investigate parental attitudes to their first languages. In other words, I did not investigate Sinhalese participants' attitudes to Sinhala and Tamil participants' attitudes to Tamil. This study also did not look at students' attitudes to learning

Sinhala, Tamil, and English. All these uninvestigated aspects leave ample scope for future research.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



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Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

May 7, 2018

To: Nimasha Malalasekera

Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [1240462-1] Sinhala and Tamil Parents' Attitudes to the Trilingual Education  
Policy of 2012

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Sinhala and Tamil Parents' Attitudes to the Trilingual  
Title: Education  
Policy of 2012  
Received: May 4, 2018  
Exemption Category: 2  
Effective Date: May 7, 2018

This action is included on the May 30, 2018 IRB Agenda.

Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.

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## Appendix B: Questionnaire on Demographic Information

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Address: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your first language? Tamil \_\_\_\_\_ English \_\_\_\_\_ Sinhala \_\_\_\_\_
5. What other language(s) do you speak? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Choose your highest level of education:
  - G.C.E O/L
  - G.C.E A/L
  - Diploma/Higher diploma
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Ph.D.
8. What school does your child attend? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you have other children? \_\_\_\_\_
10. If so, do they attend a tuition language class? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, which class(es)? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

Prior to the interview:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Please tell me whether you want me to speak to you in Sinhala or English or you are fine with me using both languages.

[To the Tamil L1 speakers] I apologize for not being able to conduct the interview in Tamil due to my lack of proficiency in the language.

You can speak in Sinhala or English or in both languages during the interview. [To the Tamil speakers] Once again, I apologize for not being able to accommodate the Tamil language, but if there is something you wish to express in Tamil, please feel free to do so and I will find a way to get it translated.

My university requires that I go over the informed consent form with you before the interview.

[Hand over the forms to the participant.] This form gives you details about the study and asks whether you would like to take part in it.

Participating in this study is voluntary. It means that it is your choice, so you can ask me to stop the interview at any point if you feel uncomfortable. You don't have to answer questions that you feel uncomfortable answering.

I would like to audio record the interview to get accurate information. The recordings will be used only for this study and would not be used in a way that would bring harm to you. I will not mention your name in the study. If you do not want me to record, just let me know and I will rely on my notes.

Please read the consent form and tell me if you have any questions [wait for a few minutes while the participant looks over the form.] Do you have any other questions before we get started? [Answer any further questions.]

If you are ready, please sign the consent form here [indicate signature line]. If it is okay for me to record, please mark this box here [indicate box on consent form]. Thank you.

After signing the informed consent forms:

Thank you for signing the informed consent forms. Before we begin our conversation properly, I have just a few questions on this form that I want to go over with you. [Hand over a copy of the questionnaire on demographics to the participant. Go through the questions with them.] I have filled in certain details already. We can fill in the rest together. Please tell me if there is anything that is unclear.

After the demographic questionnaire:

Thank you so much. Now I would like to talk about your child's language education with you.

Preliminary Interview Questions:

Standard follow-up questions are:

Why/Why not?

Can you tell me more about that?

How did that make you feel?

When you say \_\_\_\_\_ can you tell me more about what that means?

Can you give me an example of \_\_\_\_\_?

Sample interview questions: semi-structured, organized by bigger question and followed by potential follow up questions based on responses received.

Background:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your child?
- Can you tell me about your child's language education?

Attitudes to the three languages in the Trilingual Education Policy:

- How does your child like this class?



- Can you tell me a little bit about how your child likes other language tuition classes?
- What about the languages taught in school? Can you share a little bit about that with me?
- You must be having interesting stories to share with me about your child's progress in language education. I'd love to hear about that. Can you share a little bit about that with me?
- It must be challenging to get time off your busy schedule to help your child with his/her language education. Can you tell me a little bit about that? How do you help him/her out?
- What about you? Have you learned Sinhala, Tamil or English? What was that like?

#### Trilingual Education Policy:

- The members of my research committee find it difficult to understand this requirement to learn Sinhala, Tamil and English in school. I am still thinking how to explain it to them. Can you tell me how you would explain that?
- I've heard that you can take all three languages for the G.C.E O/L examination. I wonder if that is the case. Can you share your thoughts on that?

#### Follow-up interview:

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. I would like to ask you a few questions about somethings we discussed in our last interview.

(This script does not have any predetermined questions since the follow-up questions will be based on the preliminary interviews with the participants.

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (English)**

### **Informed Consent Form**

### **Parental Attitudes to the Trilingual Education Policy in Sri Lanka**

IRB 1240462

Date Approved May 7, 2018

#### **Description of the Study:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. My study is about language learning in Sri Lanka. I also want to know what you think of Sinhala, Tamil and English. Please read this form carefully. Please ask questions. I am happy to discuss the study and answer any questions before you decide whether or not to participate.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign this form, fill out a questionnaire, and take part in two interviews. Interviews will be at your convenience.

In order to report what you say accurately, I would like to audio record our conversation and take notes. If the recording makes you uncomfortable, I will rely only on my notes.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Your participation is voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If anything I do or say makes you uncomfortable please tell me. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you withdraw from the study, any and all data I have collected from you will be destroyed.

There are no benefits of taking part in this study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

- Any information obtained about you from the research will be kept confidential.
- Any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.
- We will code your information with a number so no one can trace your answers to your name.
- We will properly dispose paperwork and securely store all research records.
- Your name will not be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in the study, you can stop at any time or change your mind and ask to be removed from the study. Whether or not you choose to participate, will not affect your grades/ services you are receiving/etc.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions now, feel free to ask me (us) now. If you have questions later, you may contact

1) Nimasha Malalasekera  
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The UAF Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a group that examines research projects involving people. This review is done to protect the rights and welfare of people involved the research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area) or uaf-irb@alaska.edu.

Statement of Consent:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I am 18 years old or older. I have been provided a copy of this form.

Are you willing to be audio recorded? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant & Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent &  
Date